

I invite you to open your bibles this morning to today's scripture text which can be found in Matthew, the 5th chapter, verses 1 – 9. This is our seventh and final week in our seven-week series on the beatitudes. Today our focus is on the Peace makers.

Mt 5:1-9 5 Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them, saying:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NIV

Throughout the last six weeks, we have been discovering the hallmarks of the *Christian life*, the *characteristics* of the *blessed life*, and the **blessings** that flow from God as a result of *seeking and accepting Jesus Christ* as our Lord and savior. In each of the beatitudes, it has been impressed upon us that the *key* that opens the door to each of the pronounced blessings, is change. Genuine life change.

Not the deadly successes of *false change* or the hypocritical *external display of change* obtained through following the worldly teachers of false doctrines, so-called masters of insight and knowledge. The world's false understanding saying that a person can be saved *without being changed*. Or: that a person can inherit eternal life even if his *attitudes and actions* are **like** the attitudes and actions of *unbelievers*. Through the world's teachings, each beatitude is another nail driven into a coffin. Inside the coffin lies the corpse of a false understanding of salvation.

Genuine life change! We are discovering the gospel dynamics of life change. Taught to us by our living Lord, Jesus. The way, the truth, and the life, that only living in communion with Christ, abiding with God, moment by moment, through our discipleship with Jesus brings. Life change that truthful, deep self-examination, and honest objectivity brings us. Revealing our identity, with transformed lives leading into righteousness; resulted from a progressive sanctification, justifying us to be as God intends us to be, his children, the sons of God. Christ is the guarantee, and the Holy Spirit is the guarantor, giving us the ultimate life reward, *that will be*, an eternity with God in heaven. Completely blessed, restored, whole, without suffering, painless, purified, and peaceful; *with God* in *his* amazing creation. Who could ask for anything more? This *is* the promise that Jesus offers to us and to the rest of the world.

One after the other the beatitudes tell us that the blessings of eternity will be given only to those who have *become* new creatures. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.

If we don't obtain mercy, we receive judgment. If we don't see God, we are not in heaven. If we aren't call the sons of God, we are outside the family. In other words, these are all descriptions of *final salvation*. And it is promised only to the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers.

Therefore, the beatitudes are like long spikes holding down the lid of the coffin on the false teaching which says that if you just believe in Jesus you will go to heaven whether or not you are merciful or pure in heart or a peacemaker. Get yourself a new heart! Become a new person! The river of judgment is at the door! You recall the words of verse 20 in the 5th chapter of Matthew: "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

And at the very end of the sermon in Matt 7:26 the Lord calls out over the crowds, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it." In other words, a life of *disobedience to the beatitudes* and to the *Sermon on the Mount* will **not** stand in the judgement, no matter what we believe!

I have been convicted recently, that I have probably not treated this dimension of the beatitudes *with* as much *earnestness* and *seriousness* as I should. That the *care* that I have for *your eternal good* has **not** shown itself as *genuinely* as it **must**. While reading an old book written to pastors by Horatius Bonar titled "Words to Winners of Souls" I was convicted when he said,

"Our words are feeble, even when sound and true; our looks are careless, even when our words are weighty; and our tones betray the apathy which both words and looks disguise."

So, I *must* impress upon your consciences today with as much *earnestness* as I can that in the beatitudes Jesus is not making optional suggestions, and this sermon is not a series of *suggestions* on how to make the world better. On the contrary, Jesus is describing *the pathway to heaven*, and this sermon is a message from God to urge you to *get on that pathway* and *stay on that pathway* so that you can be called *sons of God* at the last judgement.

That is what is at stake here. If you are on the narrow path which leads to life, my purpose is to help you stay on it, and if you are still in the broad way that leads to destruction, my purpose is to direct you to the path of life.

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 are peacemakers will be recognized as the sons of God at the judgment and they will be called what they are and welcomed into the Father's house.

To see how to become sons of God we can look, for example, at John 1:12, and Galatians 3:26. John 1:12 says *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—* And Gal 3:26 says *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.* In other words, we become sons of God by trusting in Christ for our forgiveness and hope.

What Jesus is saying in Matthew 5:9, today's beatitude, is that people who have become sons of God have the character of their heavenly Father. And we know from Scripture that their heavenly Father is a "God of peace" (Rom 16:20; 1Thes 5:23; Heb13:20). We know that heaven is a world of peace (Luke 19:38). And most important of all, we know that God is a peacemaker!

"God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2cor5:19). He made peace by the blood of the cross (Colossians 1:20). In other words, even though by nature we are rebels against God and have committed high treason and are worthy to be eternally court-martialed and hanged by the neck until dead, nevertheless God has sacrificed his own Son and now declares amnesty free and clear to any who will lay down their arms of independence and come home to faith.

God is a peace-loving God, and a peacemaking God. The whole history of redemption, climaxing in the death and resurrection of Jesus, is God's strategy to bring about a *just and lasting peace* between rebel man and himself, and then, between man and man. Therefore, God's children are that way, too. They have the character of their Father. What he loves they love. What he pursues they pursue. You can know his children by whether they are willing to make sacrifices for peace the way God did.

By the sovereign work of God's grace rebel human beings are born again, and brought from rebellion to faith, and made into children of God. We were given a new nature, after the image of our heavenly Father (*1John3:9*). If he is a peacemaker, then his children, who have his nature, will be peacemakers too.

Or to put it another way, as 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 therefore, as he says in Rom8:14 "All who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God." And being led by the Spirit always includes bearing the fruit of the Spirit. And the fruit of the Spirit is peace! Jesus Christ is the *guarantee*, and the Holy Spirit is the *guarantor*.

So, you see why it must be so, that the children of God must be peacemakers. It is by the Spirit of God that we are made children of God, and the Spirit of God is the Spirit of peace. If we are not peacemakers, we don't have the Spirit of Christ.

So, we do not earn or merit the privilege to be called sons of God. Instead we owe our new birth to the sovereign grace of God (*John 1:13*). We owe our faith to the impulses of the new birth (*1John5:1*). We receive the Holy Spirit by the exercise of this faith (*Gal3:2*) The fruit of this Spirit is peace (*gal 5:22*). And those who bear the fruit of peace are the sons of God.

Our whole salvation, from beginning to end, is all of grace—therein lies our hope and joy and freedom. But our final salvation is not unconditional, we must be peacemakers—therein lies our earnestness and the great seriousness with which we must deal with these beatitudes, and seek the grace of God in our lives.

So now let's look at what it means to be a peacemaker. The promise of sonship in the second half of the Matthew 5:9 points us to Matthew 5:43-45 for our main insight. Both of these texts describe how we can show ourselves to be sons of God.

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Notice verse 45, ". . . so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." The thought is the same as in Matt 5:9. There, we must be peacemakers to be called sons of God. Here, we must love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us if we would be sons of God.

So probably, Jesus thinks of peacemaking as all the acts of love by which we try to overcome the enmity between us and other people. And if we ask for specifics, he gives two examples.

The first thing he mentions is prayer (verse 44): Pray for those who persecute you. Pray what? The next chapter tells us. In Matthew 6:9–10 Jesus says, "Pray like this." Pray that you and your enemy would hallow God's name. Pray that God's kingdom be acknowledged in your life and his life. Pray that you and he would do God's will the way the angels do it in heaven. In other words, pray for conversion and sanctification. The basis of peace is purity. Pray for yours and pray for his, that there might be peace.

Then in Matthew 5:47 Jesus gives the other specific example of peacemaking-love in this text: "If you salute (or greet) only your brethren, what more are you doing than others?" In other words, if there is a rupture in one of your relationships, or if there is someone who opposes you, don't nurse that grudge. Don't feed the animosity by ignoring and avoiding that person. That is the natural thing to do—just cross the street so that you don't have to greet them. But that is not the impulse of the Spirit of a peacemaking God, who sacrificed his Son to reconcile us to himself and to each other.

Peacemaking tries to build bridges to people. It does not want the animosity to remain. It wants reconciliation. It wants harmony. And so, it tries to show what may be the only courtesy the enemy will tolerate, namely, a greeting. The peacemaker looks the enemy right in the eye and says, "Good morning, John." And he says it with a longing for peace in his heart, not with a phony gloss of politeness to cover his anger.

So we pray and we take whatever practical initiatives we can to make peace, beginning with something as *simple* as a *greeting*. But we do not always succeed. And I want to make sure you don't equate *peacemaking* with *peace-achieving*. A peacemaker *longs for peace*, and *works for peace*, and *sacrifices for peace*. But the *attainment* of peace may *not come*.

Romans 12:18 is very important at this point. There Paul says, "If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all." That is the *goal* of a peacemaker: "If possible, so far as it depends on you . . ." Don't let the rupture in the relationship be your fault.

Ah, but that raises a tough question: Is it your fault when the stand that you take is causing the division? If you have alienated someone and brought down their anger upon your head because you have done or said what is right, have you ceased to be a peacemaker?

Not necessarily. Paul said, "If it is possible . . . live at peace." He thus *admits* that there will be times that *standing for the truth will make it impossible*. For example, he says to the Corinthians (in 11:18–19), "I hear that there are divisions among you; and I partly believe it, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized." Now he would not have said that, if the genuine Christians should have *compromised the truth* in order to *prevent divisions* at **all cost**. It was precisely because some of the Christians were genuine—genuine peacemakers—that some of the divisions existed.

In the 10th chapter of Matthew verse 34, Jesus said,

Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes will be those of his own household.

In other words, you must *love peace* and *work for peace*. You must **pray** for your enemies, and do *good to them*, and *greet them*, and *long* for the barriers between you to be *overcome*. But you must never abandon your allegiance to me and my word, no matter how much animosity it brings down on your head. You are not guilty; you are not in the wrong if your life of obedience and your message of love and truth elicit hostility from some and affirmation from others.

Perhaps it's just this warning that Jesus wants to sound when the very next beatitude says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake." In other words, righteousness must not be compromised in order to make peace with your persecutors. When Jesus pronounces a blessing on you for being *persecuted for the sake of righteousness*, he clearly subordinates the *goal of peace* to the *goal of righteousness*.

In James 3:17 it says "The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable." First pure, then peaceable, **not** the other way around. And that is the order we have in the beatitudes also (in verses 8 and 9): **First**, "Blessed are the pure in heart," **then**, "Blessed are the peacemakers." *Purity takes precedence over peace*. Purity is the *basis of biblical peace*. Purity may **not** be compromised in order to *make peace*.

Why does a message on peacemaking from the Sermon on the Mount focus on the individual issues of prayer and greetings and personal reconciliation? Aren't these personal issues insignificant in comparison with the issues of nuclear war, military budgets, arms talks in Geneva, apartheid in South Africa, civil wars in Central America, religious oppression in Romania and Russia, and international terrorism?

The answer is no, because the point of these *personal issues* in the Sermon on the Mount is to make *crystal clear* that **every individual** within the hearing of Christ's voice **must** become a *new creature* **if** you are to have eternal life. You **must** have a *new heart*. Without a merciful, pure, peacemaking heart you cannot be called a son of God at the judgment day. And that is the truly weighty matter in the world today.

Is the Son of Man confined in his views of the world, is he out of touch with the real issues of life because he regards the eternal salvation of your soul as a weightier matter than the temporal destiny of any nation on earth?

Blessed are you peacemakers who pray for your enemies and greet your opponents with love and sacrifice like your heavenly Father for the *reconciliation of people to God and to each other*, for **you will be called sons of God**, and inherit *eternal life* in the kingdom of your Father.

Closing Prayer

- Oh gracious God we thank you for the peace that we have
through our Lord Jesus Christ
- But though because of our sin we were in conflict with you
Because you are righteous and holy and as a righteous and holy judge
You must judge sin.
- We thank you for this great peace that has been accomplished
And as the recipients of such peace we ask that you would help us
To make peace with others.
- That we would not desire to gain the upper hand in conflicts
And to prove ourselves right,
- But that with humility and patience we would show love towards others
Who we have wronged or that have wronged us.
- We ask that by your spirit that you would fill us with this love of peace
And the desire to make peace.
- So that we would keep the unity of the spirit that has been created
By our common unity we have in our Lord Jesus Christ