

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

The tense political atmosphere of the Jewish nation subjugated under the power of Roman dominion since 63 B.C. would lend a contradictory background for this beatitude. No doubt some in the crowd on the mount were passionate zealots, inflamed and committed to removing the Roman occupation. But Jesus didn't compromise kingdom principles because of members in His audience who would take offense, but pronounced the truth.

The New York Times reported in 1968 that there had been 14, 553 wars since 36 B.C. Since 1945, there had been 50 to 70 wars, and 164 internationally significant outbreaks of violence. Since 1958, 82 nations have been involved in conflict. Former President Nixon's election theme in 1970 was "Peace, a generation of peace." He said "We shall have a generation of peace-something we have never had in this nation." Some historians say that the United States had two generations of peace, from 1815 to 1846 and from 1865 to 1898. However, they say that because they don't include the Indian Wars in their accounts. Those two periods of time were bathed in the blood of the Indians. We have never known a generation of peace in the history of America.

Matthew 5:9

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

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 called 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. In fact, from beginning to end the Sermon on the Mount cries out, "Get yourself a new heart! Become a new person! The river of judgment is at the door!" You recall the words of verse 20: "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

And at the very end of the sermon in 7:26f the Lord calls out over the crowds, "Every one 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 judgment no matter what we believe!

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, "To all who received him (Jesus), who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." And Galatians 3:26 says, "For in Christ we are all sons of God through faith." 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 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" (Romans 16:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 13:20). 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" (2 Corinthians 5:19). 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 marshalled 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 (1 John 3:9). 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 Romans 8:14, "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!

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 (1 John 5:1). We receive the Holy Spirit by the exercise of this faith (Galatians 3:2). The fruit of this Spirit is peace (Galatians 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.

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 Matthew 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 and restoration. 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 air 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 break 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. (Also see I Corinthians 7: 15.)

Jesus said in Matthew 10:34,

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 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.

Now I want to close by dealing with one more question that a message like this would raise for some people today. Why, in view of the world situation, does this message on peacemaking confine itself to the personal dimensions of prayer and greetings and individual reconciliation? Aren't these personal issues insignificant in comparison with the issues of nuclear war, military budgets, arms talks in Geneva, civil wars in Africa, religious oppression in Muslim and other countries, and international terrorism?

Before we answer that question, let's ask another one. Was Jesus unaware that the iron hand of the Roman Empire rested on the tiny land of the Jews without their consent? Was he aware that Archelaus slaughtered 3,000 Jews at a Passover celebration? Was he aware that the Roman soldiers could conscript any Jew they chose to carry their baggage? Was he aware that Pilate had his soldiers bludgeon a crowd of Jews protesting his stealing from the temple treasury? Was he aware that Pilate massacred Jews on the temple ground and mixed their blood with their sacrifices they were offering?

When Jesus spoke of enemies, why did he confine himself to prayer and personal greetings and blessings and individual deeds of generosity and kindness? Why didn't he talk about the issues of national humiliation, and Roman oppression and political corruption and the unbridled militarism of his day? Was he utterly out of touch with the big issues of his day?

No. There is another explanation for why he preaches the way he does. In Luke 13:1-5 some people confronted Jesus with one of Pilate's atrocities. Here's the way he responded: There were some present at that very time who told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

He took a major social outrage of injustice and turned it into a demand for personal, individual repentance. "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish!" That's what he always did. Why did he do this? Because for Jesus the eternal destiny of a human soul is a weightier matter, a bigger issue, than the temporal destiny of a nation.

If you come to Jesus with a question about the justice of taxes to Tiberias Caesar he will turn it into a personal command aimed right at your own heart: "You give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:15-21).

If you come to Jesus with a complaint about the injustice of your brother who will not divide the inheritance with you, he will turn it into a warning to your own conscience, "Man, who made me a judge or divider over you? ... Take heed and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:13-15).

Now let's go back to the question. Why does a message on peacemaking from the Sermon on the Mount focus on the individual issues of prayer and greetings and personal reconciliation? The answer is 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 my 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 kingdom of your Father.

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