

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

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 November 2020

Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] Now, our readings before we turn to Jesus' words in Matthew come from Colossians. First of all, chapter 1, verse 15 to 23.

And then a short section in chapter 3, verses 15 to 17, where again we'll see the theme of peace come through. So let's hear God's word together.

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities.

All things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church.

He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him 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.

[1 : 20] Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you wholly in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

If you continue in your faith, established and firm and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

And then over in chapter 3 at verse 15, where we read this.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you are called to peace. And be thankful.

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

[2 : 30] And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

So we've come to beatitude number seven, as we've been thinking about these countercultural values of God's kingdom.

And beatitude seven, Matthew chapter five, verse nine says, Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Now the challenge is for us as the church to pursue peace, to live for peace in an age marked by outrage and division.

I want to begin with the Christmas song, Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. Who doesn't love Rudolph? Well, apparently a lot of people.

- [3 : 26] In actual fact, it ended up on the banned list for a large number of people last year. Why? Because it was said to have bullying content.
- And people began to react and there was a bit of a campaign. And 8,000 people responded to a news article wanting to express their outrage.
- How could we possibly allow our children to sing it? Now, that seems a small thing, but it's a sign that as a society, we are moving more quickly towards outrage.
- And then think about something much more serious, the US election. What have we seen? We've seen protest and counter-protest. We are witnessing deep divisions that can be evident in nations and societies.
- It's become clear that there's going to be no quick fix, no instant healing to a very polarised, it seems, society. And then think with me of Neville Chamberlain, a former British Prime Minister who, back in September 1938, who, having met with Adolf Hitler, came back to Britain September 1938 with the announcement that he had secured peace for our time.
- [5 : 02] And that was greeted with great joy. But then, not quite one year later, September 1939, as he announced that Britain was declaring war on Germany, he had to recognise my long struggle for peace had failed.
- Peace is something we want. Peace as wholeness. Peace as restoration. Peace as joyful delight.
- Peace as joyful delight.
- What the Bible talks about as shalom, all of life flourishing. We need to realise that that's only found in God. Because peace is who God is.
- In numerous places, that's how God's described. For example, Romans chapter 15, verse 33. Paul talks about the God of peace. And again, in another letter, 2 Corinthians chapter 13, verse 11, he is described as the God of peace and love.
- [6 : 29] So that's who God is. And then we can think about Jesus. Isaiah chapter 9, verse 7, predicting the coming of Jesus. He is described as the Prince of Peace. Maybe we recognise that from Christmas.
- And then we read in Colossians chapter 3, verse 15. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. So our God is a God of peace.
- But we also need to recognise peace is what God makes. That's why we read from Colossians chapter 1 and at verse 20. Where we read that God reconciles through Jesus. He reconciles by making peace through the blood of Jesus, which was shed on the cross. So it's a reminder, peace is a gift from God.
- It's a gift of his grace. It reminds us that peace is costly. Justice had to be met. We are guilty of sin that divides and separates and spoils.
- [7 : 36] That's both against God and against others. And justice needed to be served on that. And Jesus took the just anger of God against our sin on himself.
- The price for our peace is the blood of Jesus. We needed the God-man, Jesus, to reconcile us.
- To bring us peace. So to find peace, you must first of all know the God of peace. To be a peacemaker, which is what Jesus is calling people to, you must first find peace with God.
- And then we understand that here is our God, the God of peace. His family value is to pursue and promote peace. We have that saying, don't we, like father like son.
- Well, this is where it plays out in the world of peacemaking. The peacemaking father has peacemaking children. That should be our heart.

- [8 : 45] That should be our motivation as the people of God. But the foundation is that we have a God of peace who has acted in Christ, in love, to provide for our peace.
- So then on to the task. Because Jesus says we are called to be peacemakers. Now I want us to remember, as we go through the Beatitudes, first of all, that these are words spoken to those who are already saved, who have already been reconciled.
- Jesus isn't saying, be a peacemaker in order to enter God's kingdom. No, it's as those who have already entered the kingdom, you are to then pursue the values of the kingdom.
- So it's spoken to those already saved. And secondly, it's not optional. These eight Beatitudes are eight ideals for every Christian to pursue.
- So we must pursue peace. If we want to be faithful to the Lord Jesus. What I want to do to help to think this through briefly is to make four statements that ought to be true of Christians in reference to making peace.
- [10 : 10] So our first statement is this. Christians use their influence to promote peace. Now you and I, of course, we'll have different spheres of influence.
- We move in different circles. We have different jobs and circumstances. But at very least, it means that privately and publicly, we are to pursue and promote peace.
- So whether that's in our home with our families or with our flatmates, whether that's in our workspaces or on the street in which we live, the school gates that we spend time around, we are to be those who would pursue peace.
- It also means that whether we are communicating and relating to people in person or online. And isn't that just a phrase that's become so familiar to us in these days.
- However, we are communicating and relating, we are to promote peace. And I think there's a particular challenge that many are now recognising connected to online, relating to others and social media.
- [11 : 27] It's something that way before social media, Nelson Mandela identified. He said this. He said to dehumanise and demonise our opponents is to abandon the possibility of peacefully resolving our differences.
- Now, we can think about politics and the stones that are thrown and the lack of civil discourse. But we can maybe also recognise that when we type in haste about issues or people that provoke our passion, sometimes we make them into objects and that distance means we dehumanise.
- We would speak about someone differently behind the security of a screen than we would do face to face. So we need to be careful to promote peace, whether we're speaking privately, publicly, in person or online.
- Second statement. Christians act as agents of reconciliation. Now, we're speaking about a particular kind of peace, true deep peace, peace with God here.
- Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthians and in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verses 19 to 21, there is a flow of logic. Where Paul speaks to the church and says, you have been reconciled through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- [13 : 13] And because of that, you are now ambassadors. You are those who speak for the king. We don't have our own message or agenda. We speak for the king.
- And the king's message that we as the church, we as Christians are to declare is be reconciled to God. So understanding that true peace involves peace with God.
- Understanding that peace with God comes through Jesus, the peacemaker and his work on the cross. Because all of us have a responsibility to do the work of evangelism and mission.

To help people by proclaiming the gospel. Now, whether we do that by ourselves or whether we do that as a church, as we were thinking about this morning.

Whether we do that through our works or with our words. Because all of us have a responsibility to act as agents of reconciliation.

[14 : 13] As those who have been reconciled. Third statement. Christians value unity and peace in the church.

In God's providence, we were thinking about unity from John 17 this morning. Remember Jesus' prayer for the church in all times and all places.

He prayed that we would enjoy unity. Unity with the Father through the Son. Unity for the sake of mission. So unity and peace is something that Jesus prayed for.

Ultimately, it's something that Jesus died for. And he identifies for us the importance of unity and peace for our mission. It can have a negative impact.

Where fighting and bitterness and gossip give the reputation of Jesus a bad name. Slow down the work of mission. Or positively.

[15 : 20] In contrast to the disunity and disharmony that's all around us when the church is practicing peace and love. It's a positive reason for people to consider Jesus and the difference that he makes and the truth that he brings.

So as Christians, we are to value and to protect unity and peace in the church. I came across this, well I think anyways, a helpful illustration from John Owen, the Puritan.

It made me think about where we're at with lockdown restrictions. I guess a lot like myself. But fire pits in preparation for the winter.

Some people go and buy logs. We have a bundle of old branches that have been cut down over the years looking for a good use.

And now I'm getting the chance to put them to good use. But the thing about these branches, they're all sorts of different shapes and sizes. And actually they're really hard to carry because there's bits that stick out. Some are fat, some are thin.

[16 : 28] But if I use my common sense and if I tied them with a rope together, I'd be able to carry the whole lot. No bother.

What John Owen says, it's what Jesus does. Jesus binds the church together. People of all shapes and sizes, all different temperaments and personalities. He binds the church together with his peace so he can carry us all to heaven.

I love that. Jesus has come to create this unity, this peace. And he sends the spirit, the gift of peace comes to us.

So we must value it and protect it. Fourth statement. Christians are willing to pay the price for peace.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer makes the important point. That Jesus took the cross on himself for our reconciliation.

[17 : 35] And he says then that because we are partners with Jesus, we are agents of reconciliation. We too have to be willing to pay the price in peacemaking.

Now what kind of price might there be for us as we look to make peace? Well, first of all, it might be the price of humbling ourselves to apologise.

Of swallowing our pride. Of making the first move. Of acting quickly to put things right. That's a painful price, isn't it?

But it's going to be necessary to promote peace. Perhaps the price in peacemaking will be in overlooking offences.

As the Bible says, love covers over a multitude of sins. Our outrage culture is very quick to jump on people's mistakes.

[18 : 46] There is a one strike and you're out mentality. And so it can be easy to be, as it were, like a dog with a bone. We're going to hang on to someone's mistake and we're going to punish them.

Making peace sometimes is going to mean saying nothing. It might mean choosing to believe the best in a person.

To read things in the best possible light. The price in peacemaking, on the other hand, might mean, will mean, sometimes, speaking the truth in love.

So we're not to be like the dog with a bone, but neither are we to try and simply let sleeping dogs lie. Let's not probe under the surface.

Let's just, you know, have the sort of veneer of peace. The Bible isn't calling us to Chamberlain's false peace, appeasement.

[19 : 50] We need to aim for real peace, real restoration. And that can be costly. Sometimes we will look for it and we will be knocked back.

Sometimes we will be shot at. But sometimes peace means rebuking someone honestly. So we need to humble ourselves and come to them in love.

But we want to restore and to help. Another price in peacemaking, and this relates to looking to bring people to peace with God, means that we cannot water down the gospel.

And so there is the offense of the gospel. Our aim is that others would truly know peace with God through Jesus.

So we need to talk about sin. Because that's what separates. We need to talk about Jesus as the only way to salvation. That it's a gift of grace and not by our works.

[20 : 59] We need to talk about the realities of heaven and hell. And these will offend and challenge people. But if we want real peace for them, then that's a price that we must pay.

Peacemaking is not easy. Even at that surface level, just brief outline of some steps, we realise it's hard. You think about a UN peacekeeper. Sure, that's one of the most tough and dangerous jobs in the world.

You're putting yourself in the firing line, seeking to bring parties together. What Jesus calls the church, his people to, is tough.

He calls us to carrying our cross. To follow him and to follow his pattern. And for us to do this, we need to keep in view the gospel.

We need to keep in view the cost of our reconciliation. That Jesus paid and paid willingly and lovingly for us.

[22 : 02] Because the gospel is going to give us hope when we fail. When we actually break peace rather than make peace. The gospel is also going to give us the power to keep pursuing when we feel tired and we've had one more rejection.

And we also need to keep in mind the adoption that comes for us when we believe the gospel. It's as children of God we are to make peace.

And so we remember the Father's heart and the Father's values. And we remember the help that God provides as we look to be peacemakers. So it involves us in a life of prayer and seeking his wisdom and help.

Last thing to think about briefly is what's the reward for peacemakers? What's the blessing? But we'll notice the language that Jesus deliberately uses.

He's blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God. Why sons of God? Why not children of God? Why? Because sons brings the idea of inheritance. In those days it was sons that inherited.

[23 : 09] To pursue peace is to enjoy covenant blessings.

Peacemakers do what the Father has done. We seek to love like our Father. We seek to reconcile others to our Father. And we seek to lead and point people to Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

And so our inheritance is to be called sons of God. Our inheritance is not simply peace for our time.

But it's true and lasting peace for time and for eternity. Our reward is receiving an inheritance as a child of God. To know true peace with and from the God of peace.

Anticipating a future when the destroyer of peace, Satan and sin, will be dealt with and gone forever. Where we will enjoy the reign of the Prince of Peace, the Lord Jesus, in a world made perfect.

[24 : 14] A world where peace and justice will reign forever. It's the great future hope of the gospel. And as we look around at the world that we see today, Isn't this what our divided, outraged, hurting world needs more than anything else?

And as we look around at the world, we see today,