

Shalom Makers

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- [0 : 00] When the gospel grabs hold of an individual or a community, something happens. Something always happens.
- Why? Because as the Apostle Paul says in his letter to the Romans, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. The word that is translated power there is the Greek word *dunamis*, from which we get the English word dynamite.
- The power, the gospel is the dynamite of God, the dynamite of God exploding in the world unto salvation. And when the gospel grabs hold of an individual or a community, something happens.
- What is the gospel? The gospel is a name and a fact. The name, Jesus of Nazareth.
- The fact, in Jesus of Nazareth, history has reached a major crisis point. The time is fulfilled, he says. It is time for the fulfillment of God's redemptive purposes.
- [1 : 14] The kingdom of God has come near. A whole new world order is breaking in on the old. Heaven is invading the earth. The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God has come near.
- When this gospel grabs hold, when this name and fact grab hold, when Jesus causes his kingdom to break into this broken, violent, wounded earth, something happens.
- Healing begins to happen. Humpty Dumpty starts getting put back together again. And a new kind of humanity happens.
- Gospelized humanity happens. There begins to emerge within the world a new breed of human being. Not yet perfect, but nevertheless new.
- When the gospel grabs hold of an individual or a community, there emerges the new kind of humanity Jesus describes in his Sermon on the Mount. In particular, there emerges the kind of humanity he blesses in his Beatitudes.
- [2 : 25] I like how the way New Testament scholar Joachim Iremais puts it. What Jesus teaches in the sayings collected in the Sermon on the Mount is not a complete regulation of the life of the disciple, and it is not intended to be.
- Rather, what is taught here is symptoms, signs, examples of what it means when the kingdom of God breaks into the world still under sin, death, and the devil.
- Jesus says, in effect, I intend to show you by means of some examples what the new life is like. You yourselves should be signs of the coming kingdom of God.
- You yourselves should be signs that something has already taken place in history. Our text today is Matthew chapter 5, verse 9, wherein Jesus announces his seventh Beatitude.
- Because each of the Beatitudes is related to the others, we need to once again read Matthew 5, verses 3 through 12. If you are able, will you please stand for the reading of the gospel?
- [3 : 32] Hear now the word of Jesus the evangelist. Jesus the good newsizer.
- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely on account of me. Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

[4 : 34] You may be seated. Spirit of the living God, we believe that years ago you inspired Matthew the tax collector to write down these words.

And now we pray in your mercy and grace that you would take these words off the page and make them come alive in our hearts and minds as never before.

For we pray this in Jesus' name and for the sake of this city. Amen. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

Of all the Beatitudes, this is probably the best known. It has inspired more music than any of the other Beatitudes, and it's found on more greeting cards than any of the other Beatitudes.

Rightly so. For in this seventh Beatitude, Jesus bestows on ordinary human beings incredible dignity. Let me say that again.

[5 : 45] In this seventh Beatitude, Jesus bestows on ordinary human beings incredible dignity. He calls them peacemakers. Peacemakers.

Makers. Mark that verb. Makers. Jesus is not here blessing peace lovers, although he could do that. Jesus is not here blessing peace seekers, although he could say that.

Jesus is not here congratulating peace keepers, although he could say that. Jesus is here congratulating peacemakers.

Makers. Makers of peace in this world so violent and full of pain. For most people, the word peace usually refers either to inner tranquility, peace of mind, or to an outward state, the absence of war.

The biblical concept of peace certainly includes those ideas, but it goes so much deeper and so much wider. Behind the word used here in the seventh Beatitude is the Hebrew word shalom.

[7 : 01] It means soundness, well-being, wholeness. You can even hear it as you say the word shalom, round, well-being, sound.

Shalom is life as God intended it to be, a well-rounded, holistic existence. Shalom involves harmony with the earth, harmony with other people, harmony with the inner self, harmony with the living God.

Shalom is ecological soundness, relational soundness, psychological soundness, spiritual soundness.

Shalom encompasses the whole, every dimension of life, the economic and the political, as well as the personal and the religious. For the Bible, silencing guns does not mean we have reached peace.

For the Bible, feeling good inside does not mean we have reached peace. Peace reigns when the causes of strife have been healed. As Pope John Paul II has said, wars can be prevented not by arms, but by getting beyond the symptoms of war to the causes of hunger and poverty and inequality, and I would add, by getting beyond human resistance to God and His anointed.

[8 : 27] The biblical concept of peace involves so much more, so much more than inner tranquility and the absence of war. Shalom is a psychosomatic, relational, racial, economic, spiritual wholeness.

Isaiah 11. The wolf will dwell with the lamb. The leper will lie down with the kid. The lion will eat straw with the ox.

That's shalom. Isaiah 35. The wilderness and the desert will be glad. It will blossom profusely.

The eyes of the blind will be opened. The ears of the deaf will be unstopped. The lame will leap like a deer. The tongue of the dumb will shout for joy. That's shalom. Isaiah 2.

They will hammer their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning hooks. That's shalom. Ephesians 2. So then, you are no longer strangers.

[9 : 32] You are no longer aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints. You are God's household. That's shalom. Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole building, being fit together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord.

That's shalom. Revelation 21. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There shall no longer be any death. There shall no longer be any mourning or crying or pain.

That's shalom. You can see then why I say that in this seventh beatitude, Jesus is bestowing on ordinary human beings incredible dignity.

Maybe. Human beings? Makers of shalom? Lovers of shalom, of course. Seekers of shalom, of course.

Keepers of shalom? Maybe. But makers? Ordinary, broken human beings? Makers of shalom?

[10 : 39] Only the living God can make shalom. Shalom is a divine reality, a holistic soundness which only the whole God can bring into being. And yet Jesus says to the gospelized, you are shalom makers.

Wow. As I said, when the gospel grabs hold of an individual or a community, something happens. The gospelized become partners in a divine work.

Shalom makers. You lucky bums. Now remember the observation we made at the beginning of this series.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus is not describing eight different kinds of gospelized persons. One who is poor in spirit, another who is meek, another who is hungry and thirsts for righteousness, another who is pure in heart.

Rather, Jesus is describing eight different qualities which are true of the same gospelized person. Which means that every gospelized person is poor in spirit.

[11 : 47] Every gospelized person hungers and thirsts for righteousness. Every gospelized person is merciful, and every gospelized person is called to the vocation of shalom making.

Every kingdomized person, every evangelized person, every born again from above person, every spirit filled person, use whatever word you want, every disciple of Jesus Christ is a maker of shalom.

Maker. Not just lover, not just seeker, not just keeper. Maker. Maker. Jesus, you've got to gospelize us. For the sake of this city, you've got to gospelize us again.

Now, why is this mark, or why is this a mark of those who have turned around, embraced Jesus Christ, and welcomed in His kingdom?

Why is this a mark of those who have come to Jesus Christ, the Savior and Lord, and welcomed His rule in their hearts? for two basic reasons. First, Jesus, the gospelizer, is a man of peace.

[12 : 56] He is shalom Himself, right? Isaiah 9, the great Christmas text. Unto us, a child is born. To us, a son is given. And He shall be called wonderful, counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

And then there's Zechariah 9, the great Palm Sunday text. Behold, your king is coming to you. He is just and endowed with salvation, humble and mounted on a donkey. I will cut off the chariots from Ephraim, the horse from Jerusalem, the bow of war will be cut off, and He will speak peace to the nations.

The gospelizer is the prince of peace who speaks shalom into being. And those who hang around Him, those who enter into relationship with Him, cannot but become at very least shalom lovers and shalom seekers.

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it, when the disciples met Jesus of Nazareth, they found peace for He is their peace. Second, peacemaking is a mark of the gospelized because the kingdom of the gospelizer is a kingdom of peace.

The new world order breaking into the world in Jesus of Nazareth is the order of shalom. In Jesus, we see this soundness, this wholeness, this full-orbed well-being for which we were created.

[14 : 23] And in Jesus' deeds, we see shalom in the making, restoring harmony with the living God, restoring harmony with other people, restoring harmony with the inner self, and restoring harmony with the earth.

When His new world order begins to break into our lives, we cannot but become at the very least shalom lovers and seekers. And Jesus says to us, we'll become more.

We become makers. Wow. Well, what then does this peacemaking look like? What does it look like in the world of the 1990s?

In the everyday world where you and I live, what does it look like? The answer, of course, is unfolded in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, which we are going to then grapple with in the weeks to come.

In the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is simply unfolding all of that. But having soaked ourselves now for a number of weeks in the Beatitudes, five facets of our vocation as peacemakers emerge for me.

[15 : 30] I don't know everything about peacemaking, but I do know these five things. First, I know the posture for peace.

That is, I know the proper stance for receiving and experiencing shalom. I know that shalom is a gift.

It's a gift of God, a gift which can only be enjoyed in relationship with God. The peace of God is finally realized when God is allowed to be God.

on page after page, the Bible puts its finger on the root cause of the anxiety, the unrest, and the strife present in our time.

And it is that humanity has turned its back on God. God is dead leads directly and inexorably to violence and decay.

[16 : 33] Scripture makes it very clear that once the living God is moved out of the center of life, once the living God is no longer allowed to be part of the public realm, the inevitable consequence is chaos and violence.

Humanity refuses to live as creature before the Creator. Human beings, even religious human beings, have usurped the place and the role of the living God and therefore are in a state of rebellion against God.

Do I need to illustrate that? The theological declaration of Barman, written during the rise of Nazism, puts it this way, just as Jesus Christ is the assurance of God's forgiveness of all of our sins, so He is also in the same way and with the same seriousness God's mighty claim upon our whole lives.

resistance to God's mighty claim upon our lives is at the root of all the peacelessness of our time. Until that resistance ends, shalom cannot be experienced.

Is that not what the angels were singing on Christmas Eve? Remember their song on Christmas Eve? You remember the angels' song? Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth.

[18 : 03] Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth. Glory to God in the highest is the infrastructure for peace on earth. No glory to God, no peace on earth.

The shalom which Jesus Christ brings into the world is experienced when we bow the knee before the God who reigns, when we step off the throne and when we accept our place as creatures, as children, as followers.

Rodney King asked, can't we just simply get along? The answer is, no, not if the living God is left out.

It is not possible. In a speech at Stanford University, Vaclav Havel, who is president of the Czech Republic, described the current world situation and then he ended his talk with this sentence.

Humanity probably will have to go through many more Rwandas. Humanity will probably have to go through many more Chernobyls. before it understands how unbelievably short-sighted a human being can be who has forgotten he is not God.

[19 : 26] Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth. Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth. This means, therefore, that at rock bottom, shalom making is evangelism.

Bringing the good news to people so that they can turn around and receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and friend. After declaring the gospel that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, the apostle Paul goes on to say, therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ as though God were entreating through us and we beg you on behalf of Christ be reconciled to God.

we beg you lay down your resistance to the living God and come home. Only the love of God in Jesus Christ can melt that resistance.

Peacemaking, therefore, involves telling our contemporaries in as many ways as we can come up with, telling our contemporaries of that love of God, telling this city that it is safe to come home, that the Father against whom we have rebelled is waiting with outstretched arms.

Shalom is a gift of God experienced when we let God be God. That's the stance, the posture from which we make peace. Second, I know the qualifications for the shalom maker.

[20 : 59] I know the character traits necessary for making peace in our world. and they are found in the first six beatitudes. In the first six, the Prince of Peace is describing the people who have the possibility of bringing shalom into the city.

And what a surprise. Peacemakers are poor in spirit. They recognize and admit their own spiritual bankruptcy. They recognize and admit the lack of peace in their own hearts.

They recognize and admit the violence that is in their own hearts. Peacemakers are those who mourn, who grieve over their own spiritual poverty, who grieve over the sinful condition of the world and the sinful condition of their own hearts.

They weep the tears of God who weeps over the humanity that turns against Him. Peacemakers are also meek. Not weak, but meek. They can resist the temptation to hurt those who hurt them.

They can resist the temptation to take vengeance into their own hands, for they have thrown themselves on the living God and they are trusting Him to bring vindication. Peacemakers are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

[22 : 16] Their appetites have changed. Their basic desire and drive is to see the right relatedness of God worked out in the world. They recognize that we live in one world and they look out for the welfare of the whole world and not just their own little empires.

They treat other human beings with great respect and not just pawns in a great chess game. Peacemakers are merciful. They do not give to others what they deserve.

Rather, they give to others what they do not deserve. They give pardon and kindness. They are able to put themselves in another human being's shoes. Or another culture's shoes.

Or another nation's shoes. Peacemakers are pure in heart. They abhor deceit and hypocrisy and manipulation. They can spot it in their own hearts and they want it out.

They want to know the truth. They want to see all of life from God's eyes. And they recognize their own lust for power in their own hearts and are able to distinguish that from the moving of the Spirit. They simply seek the face of Jesus.

[23 : 22] according to the Prince of Peace, it is the Beatitude people who are going to be agents of shalom. They're the ones who can make shalom in the world.

I'm concerned that as the so-called culture wars heat up, you know what I mean by culture wars? I'm concerned as the so-called culture wars heat up that some leaders might win the battles but end up losing the war by the way they treat the opposition.

We are not called to win a war. We are called to win hearts. Jesus is saying that those who can win hearts are poor in spirit and merciful.

The others can win a war. It's the pure in heart and merciful who will make peace. Third, I know what happens to shalom makers.

They receive the approval and blessing of God and sometimes they receive the approval and blessing of people and sometimes they receive the scorn and opposition of people.

[24 : 40] If the first six Beatitudes describe the qualifications for the peacemakers, the eighth Beatitude describes the consequences. Blessed are those who are persecuted. Sorry, but it happens.

Be about the business of shalom making and we'll encounter trouble. Trouble with an entrenched status quo and often you can find yourself in trouble with the church.

Jesus warns those who follow Him on the path of peacemaking that just as rebellious human hearts resisted Him, they will resist them. E. Stanley Jones once said, people hate being disturbed even if it's for their own good.

The world system cannot handle the pure in heart and the poor in spirit. Especially when the pure in heart and poor in spirit keep on insisting that God needs to be God here and that the kingdom needs to be welcomed in.

The world system will either pressure the disciples of Jesus into compromise or pressure the disciples of Jesus into silent acquiescence. And if neither of those work, then the world system eventually has to eliminate the disciples of Jesus.

[26 : 03] Bishop Don held a camera of Brazil was fond of saying, when I feed the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask, why are these poor still poor, they call me a communist.

Shalom makers will meet opposition and sometimes they'll get hurt. Fourth, I know that shalom making involves sacrifice.

I know that shalom making always involves a cross. How did God make peace with us? Via the sacrifice of the cross.

Colossians 1, 19 to 20. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Christ and through Christ to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

Isaiah 53, 5. The chastening for our shalom fell on Him. By His scourging, we are healed. The living God makes shalom through sacrificial love and so too we.

[27 : 14] There's no other way. So Jesus says later in His Sermon on the Mount, I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil, but if anyone slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.

That's peacemaking and it's the way of the cross. Jesus says, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. That's peacemaking and it's the way of the cross.

Paul says to the Romans, never pay back evil for evil for anyone, but if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If your enemy is thirsty, give him something to drink. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

That's peacemaking and it's the way of the cross. Again, Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it so well, the disciples of Jesus make peace by choosing to endure the suffering themselves rather than inflict it on others.

Choose to endure the suffering themselves rather than inflict it on others. You know, somewhere along the line in our discipleship, we simply have to come to terms with the fact that the cross is not only the source of our new life in Christ, it is the pattern of our new life in Christ.

[28 : 37] The Prince of Peace who is our peace says to us, if you want to come after me, you're going to have to deny yourself and take up your cross daily. Shalom is made and experienced through the cross because it's through the cross that the blood flows which brings healing to the wounds of humanity.

I know one more thing about our vocation. Fifth, I know that it takes place one step at a time. I know that it happens by you and I making shalom in little ways in our own little corners of the world.

Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me. Paul says to the Romans, if possible, so far as it depends on you, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

May I suggest some little steps that we can take today? Some means five. One. One. One. One. One. One. One.

Affirm your identity and vocation in Jesus Christ. Reaffirm your identity and your vocation in Jesus Christ.

[29 : 57] If you belong to Him, you are a child of the author of shalom. You are a sister or brother of the prince of shalom. You have been granted incredible dignity.

You've been granted the dignity of causality. You are a partner in a divine enterprise. Affirm your identity and your vocation, which means, on the flip side, renouncing the ways of the old order.

Second, acknowledge any resistance against God that is in your heart. We all have it.

Acknowledge any resistance in your own heart and ask God to free you. Ask God to melt the resistance and let God be God in your heart. Third, acknowledge any anger in your heart.

Anger against another person, anger against another race, anger against another race, anger against another race, anger against another race.

[31 : 24] Acknowledge the anger and ask God to heal you. And fourth, acknowledge any fear in your heart and ask God to overcome it.

I know about fear. Fear keeps us from making peace. Acknowledge any fear and let God overcome it.

And fifth, once again, affirm the gospel. say a fresh amen to the gospel according to Jesus of Nazareth.

Affirm again that in Jesus the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near. Affirm again that in Jesus history has reached a crisis point and it is time now for heaven to break in upon the earth.

Such a reaffirmation reinvigors the courage and the hope. As Thomas Merton said at the height of the Cuban missile crisis, Christian faith begins. Christian faith begins at the point where all others stand frozen stiff in the face of the unspeakable.

[32 : 43] Nothing can finally stand against the saving rule of Jesus Christ. Affirm again the gospel. blessed are the shalom makers makers for they shall be called the children of God.

When the gospel grabs hold of an individual or a community something happens. just think of what a different city this would be.

Just think of what a different state it would be. Just think of what a different nation it would be if everyone who names the name of Jesus would simply be who he or she is in Jesus.

A maker of shalom. Will you join me in a commitment a recommitment to our gospelized vocation using the words of St. Francis of Assisi printed in your order of worship I've just put them together in a little different format and I would invite you first just look down that list so that when we go through the litany you can say the words with integrity just for a moment look at those words okay Lord Jesus make me an instrument of your peace make me Where there is injury, where there is doubt, where there is despair, where there is sadness, where there is darkness.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

[35 : 13] Amen.