

Peace-Makers

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[0 : 00] and we're going to read the first seven verses from Isaiah. Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress.

In the past, he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future, he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles by the way of the sea along the Jordan.

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in the shadow, in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.

You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy. They rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder.

For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.

[1 : 03] Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For to us, a child is born.

To us, a son is given. And the government will be upon his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and peace, there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. And then if we can read in the New Testament in Paul's letter to the Ephesians in chapter 2, and we'll pick up the reading from verse 14.

And it begins by saying this of Jesus Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one, and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations.

[2 : 34] His purpose was to create in himself one new man or one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace.

And in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.

For through him, we both have access to the Father by one spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

And in him, you too are being built together to become a temple in which God lives by his spirit. Amen.

May the Lord add his own blessing to the reading of his word. If you have access to a Bible through your phone or any other gadget, if we can turn to Matthew's Gospel.

[4 : 12] Matthew's Gospel. And in Chapter 5. And we will read there verse 9.

Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 5, verse 9. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. So we are at Beatitude number 7, getting near the end.

And this is another great statement of Jesus as part of these Beatitudes. And I want to look or explore three areas with you of this Beatitude.

The first area I'm going to explore is the great peacemaker. And the second area is the peacemakers. And the third area is the privilege granted to peacemakers.

[5 : 24] But as you probably have come to expect, before I plunge into those three areas, I do have one or two introductory comments that I would like to share with you.

And the first is this. What might have been in the mind of Jesus in declaring this Beatitude? And I want to suggest that the current situation of Jesus' day, of Jesus' time, his contemporary culture, could conceivably have been in his mind as he gave out this Beatitude, as he made this declaration, blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

But after all, Israel and Jerusalem and Judah were an occupied country, occupied by the Roman military machine.

And there would be symbols and reminders in everyday living and in the day of Jesus of that occupation. And it may well be that Jesus was also aware that Caesar Augustus, who died in AD 14, had been heralded as a great peacemaker himself.

And Jesus, no doubt, would have been aware of the military force and might and slaughter that that kind of peacemaking delivered.

[7 : 16] So he could have had that in his mind. Secondly, he might have had in his mind the history of the Old Testament. Because after all, the history of the Old Testament is also a history of war, war before Israel got into the land, war getting into the land, and war after they were in the land, ending up, of course, in exile.

And ending up in the Maccabean wars in the second century BC, and even wars nearer the time of Jesus.

Indeed, one of Jesus' disciples was Simon the Zealot. And Jesus would have been aware of those individuals within Judah and Jerusalem who were itching, one might say, to have a go with the Roman machine.

And perhaps Jesus had it in mind that now will be another way. In my coming, in my mission, the hour for which I came is going to be another way.

And thirdly, he could have had and would have had, I would dare to say, the kingdom of God, of course, in his mind when he was uttering that statement.

[8 : 51] Because he was wanting to highlight the markers and the characteristics and the descriptors of the kingdom of God and the people of the kingdom.

And here was number seven. That the kingdom of God will be characterized by people whom I will call peacemakers.

So, these are some of the things that I think were in the mind or could have been in the mind of Jesus in uttering this beatitude.

The second thing by way of introduction is the concept of peace that we have here in this beatitude. Peace is a massive concept in the Bible mentioned over 429 times.

Over 100 times in the New Testament 45 times in the letters of Paul. And the meaning of those words and I know that you will know even the Hebrew word for peace and you might even know the Greek word for peace.

[10 : 02] I would guess that most of you have heard of the Hebrew word shalom. It's a beautiful word, isn't it? It even sounds peaceful.

Shalom. And the Hebrew, the Greek word is ireni. And you must have heard that word, people that have an Irenic spirit, a peaceful spirit or a peaceful outlook or a peaceful attitude.

you can see that the Greek word ireni and our English word irenic is very, they sound even quite similar.

You know, this is the word that is a massive word in the Bible in both testaments. I actually, I don't know, I hope you can see this when I hold it up, but I've made a little formula for the word.

And it's a H2P1S2W2. H2P1S2W2.

[11 : 13] And the reason I've done that is the word shalom, and I want to also suggest to you that the Greek word is really mirroring the Hebrew word shalom.

And that word is so rich in its connotations, and it includes ideas such as harmony and happiness, prosperity, safety, salvation, whole, wholeness, and well-being.

Paul uses the word at the beginning and end of practically all his letters, so that all Paul's letters are framed by the concept of God's peace.

The God of peace be with you. Notice that when you're looking at Paul's letters, and of course in his initial greeting. So he frames all of his letters with this idea of peace.

But more than that, in the Ephesians that we read, and also in Colossians, and also in 2 Corinthians, Paul articulates the death of Christ on the cross in terms of peace and reconciliation.

[12 : 35] And we must never forget that the favourite metaphor for the death of Christ on the cross within historical reformed theology is no doubt what we call the substitutionary metaphor.

But when we examine the New Testament and Paul, we discover that Paul can see the death of Christ in different ways.

and we must never think that we have an exhaustive grasp of the death of Christ as we articulate it in terms of the particular model in our history.

And that's all I want to say by way of introduction. And that brings me to my first point, the great peacemaker. Now, I want to begin this point with an example from the history of conflict and war.

From 1937 to 45, Japan was at war with China. And in that war, Japan had committed tremendous atrocities, which I'll not go into, and some of those were in what might have been the capital of China at that time in Nanjing, killing over in that city alone 200,000 people, and many of them, thousands and thousands of them civilians.

[14 : 13] And then on December the 8th in 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, a US base and sphere of interest. So Japan was now at war on two fronts with China and with the States, both wars lasting until July, August, 1945.

but they would not surrender. And although Japan started the war with America very well, very soon the writing was on the wall, even in the first year of that war, but they would not and refused to surrender or give up.

In the 3rd of March, 1945, the US bombed, quite deliberately, 66 cities in Japan full of civilians, deliberately targeting them.

Why? Because they hoped that Japan would surrender in seeing such devastation in 66 of their cities.

That was in March of 1945. Then, later on, in July the 26th, the Potsdam Conference was held in Germany, and among other things discussed, Japan was called upon to accept unconditional surrender and total occupation by the United States Army, General MacArthur.

[15 : 42] They refused. So on the 6th of August, 1945, the US dropped the atomic bomb in the centre of the city of Hiroshima. Japan would not surrender.

So three days later, on August the 9th, the United States dropped the bomb in Nagasaki. Now, unlike any of the world's strategy for making peace, God's modus operandi, far from unleashing almighty power on his enemies, he brings about a peace based on his own surrender and sacrifice of his son on the cross of Calvary.

And he does this by the most potent power the world has ever and will ever see, and that is his outrageous love.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. here in his love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us.

And why this outrageous love? Because he wanted to bring peace to rebels, because he wanted to bring peace that wished to make war with him, and because he wanted to bring them into his family.

[17 : 12] him. And another thing I want you to notice about this great peacemaker, not just his modus operandi of peace, culminating in the cross of Christ, but I want you to notice how one-sided this movement of peace was.

This was not two people gathering at a table, two opposing hostile groups of people or armies. this was totally one-sided.

This was God who decided from all eternity, based on the outflow and generosity and outrageous love of his, that he would reach out and bring peace to those that were rebels.

And you know, the peace that he brought, of course, was nothing like the peace that Neville Chamberlain, waving his little bit of paper, called peace in our time.

This was peace, as we read in Ephesians, that was accomplished. A peace that was accomplished between God and man and between man and man and woman and in the hearts of those that were willing, if I could use the Neville Chamberlain image again, to take that piece of paper from Jesus Christ.

[18 : 47] And this is the most fundamental peace that every human being needs. This is the first peace that we need, the fundamental and primary peace that we need.

peace that God accomplished on the cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus could say, my peace I give unto you, not as the world gives.

Jesus can say, my peace I leave with you. And Ephesians tells us that he is our peace. And I just want to ask you tonight, everyone out there in Zoom, is Jesus Christ your peace?

Is he your peacemaker? That brings me to my second point, the peacemakers. And I want you to notice that the blessing that Jesus promises in this beatitude, blessed are the peacemakers, not the peace breakers, nor the peacetalkers, or still less the war makers.

But blessed, says Jesus, are the peacemakers who follow in the footsteps of the great peacemaker. Bonhoeffer, commenting on this beatitude, said this, the followers of Jesus have been called to peace.

[20 : 27] But now, they are told that they must not only have peace, but make peace. Let me ask you again, do you have the peace of Christ tonight?

And if you have, as Bonhoeffer said, been called to peace, are you a peacemaker? Peter? Colin spoke recently about the human search for peace.

Our world is full of noise and clamour and activity. Perhaps never before has there been so many things for us to consume and to demand our attention and time.

Popular culture today is like a drug, isn't it? desensitises us. We're like the hamster going round and round in the wheel of life.

Let me ask you a question. Or before I do, let me put this to you. Do we not need to press the pause button in our busyness, in the clamour, in the noise, in the activity?

[21 : 53] Here's the question I want to ask you. I ask myself it as well. Can you sit in the stillness and silence with yourself?

Do you know what's going on within your own soul? Can you stomach any introspection? And if you didn't press the pause button of your life, even for one hour, what might you discover?

Would you find the peace of Christ reigning in your heart? Are you at peace with God, even as a Christian? I'm not talking about that fundamental peace.

Perhaps I should say, do you have the peace of God? And if not, why not? It's only when our minds continue to be stayed on Jehovah, on Jesus, that we can maintain that peace that he has won for us and called us to.

Might we not help a little to bring some healing into our society, our church, our family life, by being peacemakers?

[23 : 16] So many churches and families are torn apart by the absence of peacemaking. all of us can be peacemakers, bringing healing and reconciliation to strained relationships.

Maybe some of you out there are going through strained relationships in your family at this present time. perhaps it's through a long period, a long running situation of tension, of difference, of disappointment, whatever it might be.

Can we think how we can be peacemakers? perhaps it's something at work or in your neighbourhood or your community. Peacemaking is active, peacemaking is positive.

Peacemakers reach out to try and bring peace, especially in small things. Is there somewhere in your life right now where peacemaking is needed?

Well, if you've been called by the great peacemaker to have peace, as Bonhoeffer says, then you're also called to be a peacemaker.

[24 : 53] Ask yourself this question, what am I doing, never mind the other, what am I doing to help bring about peace as a peacemaker of Christ in this situation?

This brings me to my third and final point, which will be brief. The privilege granted on peacemakers. Jesus makes this remarkable promise in this wonderful attitude.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Now, I noticed that the translation in the NIV is children of God, in the AV is children of God, in the New Revised Standard Version is children of God.

And I also noticed that the translation in the New King James Version and in the ESV is sons of God. And let me tell you that the New King James Version and the ESV have got it right.

Quos Theo, Quos Theo, Quos, the sons of God. Blessed are the peacemakers, said Jesus, for they shall be called sons of God.

[26 : 29] Now, I can understand perhaps why these other translations have put children of God. It's broader, it's more inclusive, and I'm not against that, but I think it's important to know that Jesus actually said sons of God in his day, in his culture, and all that that indicates and means.

And I want to bring three things out of this amazing statement of Jesus. Status, family resemblance, family love and intimacy.

Firstly, status. Remember, God the Father said of Jesus, this is my beloved son.

son of love. Or more literally, this is the son of my love. And of course, we know that in John's gospel, the big picture is the unique relationship that Jesus has with God the Father as God the Son.

And you know, our journey is to be conformed to the image of Christ. And the book of Hebrews said that he's bringing many sons to glory.

[27 : 54] And what I want you to grasp here is how amazing and astonishing this is, that we have come from being rebels, we have come from being strangers of the covenants of promise, we've come from being outside the commonwealth of Israel with no hope and without God to being sons.

This is the status, this is the dignity, this is the glory, and this is the honour that he raises those that are called to peace.

And notice this terminology called, this is not merely a verbal description, it's not merely an honorific title, it's a reality.

Because when the Bible uses a phrase like this, calls them, it simply means this is what they are.

Can you see how amazing that is? Of course, it's in the future tense, and that lets us realise that it's also a becoming.

[29 : 19] Yes, there's a paradox here. They are sons and they're becoming sons, being changed moment by moment, being conformed into the image of the son.

Secondly, Jesus, I believe, is more than hinting at family resemblance here. What he's really saying is, if you're not a peacemaker, if peacemaking isn't part of your spiritual DNA, there's something wrong, there's something lacking, because those who are peacemakers are like their father.

As sons, they are like their father. And finally, family love and intimacy. Not only does this concept of son speak of status and speak of family resemblance, but it speaks of family love.

this is my beloved son, the son of my love. Israel is my son, my firstborn.

And is it not wonderful that this salvation is so much more than justification, but it is God bringing us as sons and daughters into the intimacy of his family love of father, son, and spirit, his Trinitarian love.

[31 : 17] Blessed are the peacemakers. I wonder, have you been called by the great peacemaker? And can I ask, are you a peacemaker?

And have you seen the astonishing privilege that is spoken of the blessed peacemakers? They shall be called the sons of God.

May the Lord bless these things to each one of us for his glory and for our eternal good. Amen. And thank Kentucky