

"Blessed are the Peacemakers"

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It's good to see you all. Will you join me in prayer as we go to God's Word? O Lord, this morning we come to your Word.

Lord, I pray this morning that we would tremble before it. Lord, your thoughts are not our thoughts and your ways are not our ways. Lord, how much we need to learn from you.

O Lord, have mercy on us this morning. As we look into your Word, God, give us humble hearts. Lord, help us to submit to your Word.

And by your Spirit, will you search our hearts to help us see if there be any wicked way in us. Lord, I pray that for me this morning. And Lord, I pray that the truth of your Word, by the power of your Spirit, would move us to know you more and to be like you.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. He's a chip off the old block, so the saying goes.

[1 : 15] Meaning, he's kind of like where he came from. Literally, this phrase comes from back in the 1600s, the idea that a chip off of a block of wood or stone would be made of the same substance and have the same character.

And it is often used to describe a family resemblance. I have been told that my family has a strong family resemblance. You can see it in baby photos.

If you look at my grandfather's baby photo and my brother's baby photo and my nephew's baby photos, they have remarkable similarities to them. My mom used to say that when we would call her on the phone, she would pick up the phone and we would say, Hi, Mom.

And this was before cell phones and caller ID. So she would often have to say, Hello, it's good to hear from you. Now, which one are you? Because she didn't know. Because we sound alike.

And rumor has it that though my brothers and I don't physically resemble each other that much, when the four of us together, everyone says, Oh, yeah, they're brothers.

[2 : 21] They sure are. The Bible has a similar language to describe this family resemblance, and it's the language of the son of.

So in Matthew 8, verse 12, Jesus talks about sons of the kingdom, those who resemble the kingdom. In Matthew 9, 15, the ESV will use the words wedding guests to describe the sons of the wedding hall, which is a very interesting phrase.

In Matthew 13, Jesus will talk about and contrast the sons of the kingdom and the sons of the evil one. And later in Matthew 23, he will say, The sons of those who killed the prophets.

Now, let's just be clear. This is not a gendered term in the way it's being used. This is a resemblance term. This is sonship in the first century would be the characteristic family resemblance relationship.

We can broaden it to just say children, but I want you to understand how the Bible communicates this idea of family resemblance. And it raises a question for us today.

[3 : 34] As the church of Jesus, whose son do we look like? Do we look like the son of Jesus? Or are we the chip off another block?

Certainly in our world today, the public perception of the church is that we tend to be self-righteous, smug, judgmental, and maybe even more recently, angry, scary, violent, and intolerant.

Is this the Jesus that we see in the Bible? And is this the kingdom that he proclaims? This is what brings us to our passage this morning.

We're in the Beatitudes. That is Matthew 5, the first teaching section in the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus is explaining and expounding on what he came to do, and particularly in this section, what kind of kingdom he has come to bring.

And it's in contrast, in many ways, as we have seen over this series, contrast to what the expectations of the day were. And it's talking about present, inbreaking of the kingdom, and the future fullness of the kingdom that he will bring as the one who is bringing the kingdom of God.

[4 : 55] So, this is our passage. We're going to read Matthew 5, verses 1 through 11. And I didn't get the page number. 740? 759?

759. There we go. Thank you for your help. 759 is where it is if you want to use the Pew Bible. Matthew chapter 5. I'm going to read this whole section. We're going to be focusing on verse 9 today.

So, Matthew chapter 5, starting in verse 1. Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he, that is Jesus, opened his mouth and taught them, saying, 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 receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

[6 : 03] Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you, when all others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

This is God's word. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. To live in God's kingdom is to be one who makes peace like our Father in heaven.

So we're going to look at this in three steps this morning. First, we're going to look at the context of peacemaking. Secondly, we're going to look at the meaning of peacemaking. And finally, we're going to look at the power of God's peacemaking.

So if you're taking notes, there's our outline for this morning. First, the context of peacemaking. If you remember in the first century, Israel was an occupied territory by an oppressive Roman empire.

Now, the Romans wouldn't have thought of that. The Romans thought they were bringing them in to bless them and to help them be a part of a great civilization. But Israel probably didn't see it that way, did they?

[7 : 24] And particularly, there were those, the zealots in the first century, who were fomenting and working towards active military rebellion. And beyond all of this, there seemed to be this assumption that when God's Messiah would come, he would bring a military conquest to overthrow Roman rule and to establish the kingdom of heaven.

And so there was, at least in certain circles at least, an expectation that the kingdom of heaven would come with war and with violence.

Friends, it's not that hard to see that this is true today as well. Certainly, we see in the world there is much war and violence, whether it be in Gaza or in Ukraine or in Myanmar or South Sudan or other places.

We live in a world that has much war and violence. Certainly, we see it in our politics. For heaven's sakes, a couple of weeks ago, we had an attempted assassination of one of the presidential candidates.

We see it in our society. If you go to YouTube and type in road rage incidents, you will be there for the rest of your life watching YouTube videos about road rage and the way that it's happening being filmed by dash cams.

[8 : 51] We see it in our homes as we see domestic violence increase. And we see it even in our own hearts.

James chapter 4 verse 1 has a very insightful statement. It says, what causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask and you do not... you ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions.

Friends, peacemaking is such a need because our hearts are so sinful. We are driven by ego, selfishness, envy.

We have a desire for power, possessions, prestige. We want to win. We want to get revenge.

[9 : 54] We want to punish. Sometimes we experience conflict because others come at us with these attitudes. Other times we initiate this with others.

And in the midst of it, the question is, do we even... even when we are the recipients of this and not the initiators, do we respond with a spirit of peacemaking?

These are the questions that rise up in our mind about what's the context of peacemaking? Is it out there in the world? Is it here? Is it in our hearts? Is it in our relationships?

And I think the answer is probably all of the above. Interestingly, when you look through the New Testament, the concept of peace with regard to human relationships is most often applied to relationships within the church and with not easy subjects either.

Think about how much conflict we have in our own churches about these topics that the Bible addresses. So in Ephesians 2, it talks about God bringing peace between ethnic divisions.

[11 : 05] In Romans 14, it talks about bringing peace into situations where people disagree theologically and in practice about how to deal with food offered to idols.

In 1 Corinthians 14, it's how to bring peace into situations where spiritual gifts are getting out of control and people want it to be this way or that way and to lift themselves up and put others down.

In 1 Thessalonians 5, peace comes from honoring leadership, those who are raised up to be servants among you. So we need to recognize that church, if we are going to think about being peacemakers, we need to start at home in our own church.

And I'm thankful. I'm thankful for this church. We have certainly had seasons of conflict and difficulty. But I'm thankful for God's sustaining grace.

And I pray that God will continue to help us with this. There are some other passages that talk about peacemaking, not just within the church, but more broadly as Christians in the world.

[12 : 22] So Romans 12 is maybe the clearest one that we see where Paul encourages the church there, repay no one for evil, for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

And to the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink, for by so doing, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

So friends, in the broader world, this is our call. This is our call to entrust ultimate justification to God, ultimate vindication to God, and to do good and to seek peace with all as much as we are able.

So this is the need and this is the call for peacemaking. But, you may be asking, what is it? What does it look like to be a peacemaker?

[13 : 37] Well, it's easy to understand, so I want to clarify a few things. One, being a peacemaker isn't seeking for inner peace in your own heart. Though it is true that knowing God brings peace in the world, this is not about your soul care and inner self.

Peacemaking is about relationships, first and foremost, vertically with God and then secondarily, horizontally with others. In those contexts, then, secondly, it is not the absence of all conflict.

I'm just going to make a few statements without defending them all because we'd be here all morning if I tried to, but I don't believe that this beatitude calls us to pacifism, where we would never, ever be involved in international war, serving in the military, or that sort of thing.

I don't believe that Christians are excluded from those things. Though some may have that conviction and I want to honor them and give them the freedom of conscience in that, I don't believe it is the call for all believers in that.

Secondly, we need to recognize that the Bible talks about conflict in the fact that we will always have a spiritual conflict because in Ephesians 6, there is a conflict in the spiritual realms between the enemy of our souls and those who serve him and us.

[15 : 03] And so there is spiritual warfare that is ongoing and we will always be involved in it until the end of the days. And if you want to know more about that, go back and listen to last year's sermons on Revelation and you'll get to see that in full force and we'll see all that.

But thirdly, I want you to remember this. These words that Jesus spoke in Matthew 10, do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace but a sword.

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 person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me and whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Whoever finds his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Now, what Jesus is really teaching here has to do with the wholehearted, singular worship of God above all others.

and he is addressing what is a very human pattern where we love our family more than we would love God and we would seek to love God only in as much as it wouldn't provide conflict of loyalties and God and Jesus says that's not what it means to follow me.

[16 : 36] I am either Lord of all or I'm not Lord at all. Right? So that's what Jesus is saying here but recognize that he's acknowledging the coming of the gospel, the conflict of these values when God says you must worship me alone, when we live in a world that says worship all these other things, there's going to be conflicts because of those things.

So we need to recognize that this will be true in our world. And yet in the midst of that, Jesus says blessed are the peacemakers.

So knowing that these conflicts will happen inevitably if we are faithfully following the Lord, how do we then live as peacemakers in the middle of those contexts?

And again, there is so much we could say on public discourse and I'm going to say very little about it. I'm going to focus more on relationships and interpersonal conflict just so you know.

So what does it look like if it's not those things? Well, passively, peacemaking is not being quarrelsome or easily provoked. Proverbs 19.11 says, good sense makes one slow to anger and it is his glory to overlook offense.

[18 : 02] Colossians 3.12 and 13 say, put on then as God's chosen one, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving one another.

As the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. Have you ever met someone who always seems to be spoiling for a fight? They're always looking for the thing to disagree about.

They're always looking for the ideal that's being fallen short of so that we can be critical of others. They're often sensitive, easily offended, and quick to anger.

Often they're insecure and they're attacking as a way of building someone up. The peacemaker is the opposite of these things.

They will look for common ground even in the midst of conflict. They will extend grace and overlook offense where possible. They're grounded and able to endure slights because they know their identities in Christ.

[19 : 24] So this is the passivity of not being quarrelsome or easily provoked. It doesn't mean that they won't ever stand up for right. It doesn't ever mean that they would address wrongdoing or conflict, but still doing those things with a peaceable heart and a peacemaking heart.

Remember that this beatitude is not in isolation, that this beatitude is one of many, that we are to be those who hunger and thirst for righteousness and do so with meekness and with mourning and with a purity of heart and with... Which one did I forget?

That's all I can remember. So off the top of my head. That it's all of these characteristics together that characterize the kingdom of God.

So actively, what does it look like to seek reconciliation, particularly in interpersonal conflict? These are passages you've probably heard.

Matthew 5, verse 23, Jesus says, So if you are offering your gift at the altar, but remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go.

[20 : 39] First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer up your gift. And then Matthew 18, 15, says, If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone, and if he listens to you, you have gained a brother.

So in both of these, whether you know someone has something against you or whether you have something against someone, the Bible calls us as peacemakers to address these situations.

What does it look like? Well, friends, we could do seminars on this. I'm going to point you to a book and a website, Peacemakers by Ken Sandy.

This is a great biblically informed book to help think through how do we address conflict. They have a website that's Relational Wisdom 360 that's connected to the peacemakers that you can find easily through a Google search that has lots of practical wisdom and advice about how to go about addressing personal conflict in a helpful way.

I'm going to give you four quick to-dos, so to speak, on what it looks like to be a peacemaker. And these come pretty much straight from the website and from the book.

[22 : 05] So the four G's of reconciliation, the first one is to glorify God. As Christian, when we seek reconciliation, our first view is to God Himself, not to the other person.

And what that means is we go looking at Him and seeking to please Him. Peacemaking is not seeking to please other people just to please other people.

And some of us like that and we want to be people pleasers, and so that's what we're tempted to do. Some of us don't care about it at all and we want to be more antagonistic towards others.

And both of these attitudes disappear before the throne of God. And we go and we pray that God would be at work in our hearts and in the hearts of the other and that He would help us.

It allows us, as we seek God, to trust Him, to feel like we don't need to win because we can believe that He will make it clear.

[23 : 09] We will let His love and grace fill us as we go to the other person. The second step, the second G, the first one is glorify God. The second one is get the log out of your own eye.

You guys know Jesus said this in He said, before you go to a brother and try and take a speck out of his eye, you have to get the log out of your own eye. We need to ask ourselves the question, have we been critical?

Have we had a negative or overly sensitive attitude towards the other that has caused unnecessary conflict? Have we actually sinned against the other person in word or in action?

And friends, listen, we often don't see it. We have blind spots. That's a part of our sin nature is we like to justify ourselves and so it's hard to see when we sin. But hopefully, we are connected with other brothers and sisters that we can ask for their input and say, this is what I've done.

What do you see? What do you think I've done? Ask for help so that you can get this log out of your own eye so you can take an objective look at yourself and face up to your contribution to a conflict.

[24 : 24] The third G is to gently restore the brother. Galatians 6.1 says, Brothers, if anyone is caught in transgression, any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

Keep watch on yourself lest you too be tempted. How often does conflict come about because our desire is to judge rather than to restore? And again, it's not that we don't have discernment, but when we see with eyes of discernment sin that needs to be addressed, our heart in going in it is to bring restoration, to bring reconciliation, and to look at your own heart to make sure you aren't doing this for yourself but for the good of the other person.

We're not just confronting people to give them a list of their wrongs. we're bringing something to them so that there might be a restoration of relationship and of fellowship.

Our attitude should be one of gentleness rather than anger and our purpose should be restoration rather than condemnation. And then the fourth one is go and be reconciled.

One of the most unique features of biblical peacemaking is the pursuit of genuine forgiveness and reconciliation, writes Sandy. It means taking the initiative.

[25 : 54] It means starting the conversation. It means broaching the awkwardness. Go and be reconciled. Now, it's important to say not all relationships can be reconciled.

There are times when in a fallen world we can work really hard to do it and still not come to a good place. Paul and Barnabas came to a place like this in Acts, I don't remember, 13, about John Mark and whether they were going to take him with him or not.

Friends, this should be an opportunity for us to grieve the fallenness and to recognize that we never give up on hoping for and longing for reconciliation and for longing for peace.

We always want that to happen but there are times when the Romans 12 passage that we read earlier comes to mind. As much as you are able or as much as you, as have you done everything you can do to bring peace, do this.

So this is a basic outline. I want to take it one step further in peacemaking because further on in the Beatitudes Jesus says this.

[27 : 16] He says, you have heard it said you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy but I tell 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.

Friends, peacemaking extends even to our enemies and we don't always make enemies our friends. We can't always change their perspective or their motives or their actions but we must have the peace, the heart of a peacemaker even as we address those who hate us and revile us.

We'll see this next week in the last Beatitude about those who hate and persecute and revile Christians because they follow Jesus. Even in that we are called to be peacemakers.

And I hope you see through this simple and it's not it is simple it's a simple outline for a very complex situation emotionally and relationally but it's a start for us to think about am I a peacemaker following these things?

And I hope you see clearly that peacemaking is not for weak people. Peacemaking is really hard. It is costly and it requires a strength.

[28 : 51] it requires self-examination. It requires courageous initiative. It means seeking to understand before being understood. It will cost us thought and time and the energy of our heart and it will cause us call us to humility to die to self and to put others first.

It is a high calling. And friends we don't always do it perfectly. I certainly know that I haven't always in this church but by God's grace may it be so more and more.

Many of you may be thinking of the prayer written by Francis Assisi long ago. I know we're going long but I do want to read this because I think it will be helpful for us that this would be the prayer that we would pray as well.

Lord make me an instrument of your peace where there is hatred let me sow love where there is injury pardon where there is doubt faith where there is despair hope where there is darkness light where there is sadness joy oh divine master grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console to be understood as to understand to be loved as to love for it is in giving that we receive it is in pardoning that we are pardoned and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Friends this is the power then finally of God's peacemaking work Francis of Assisi gets it this last verse of his prayer prayer is in dying that we are born to eternal life how do we know that because this is what God has done for us Colossians 1 verse 19 says this for in him that is in Christ in Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven making peace by the blood of his cross and you who were once alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him if indeed you continue in the faith stable and steadfast not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven and of which I

[31 : 36] Paul became a minister God came to us in Christ and Christ came and laid down his life for us and shed his blood for us to make peace between us and God for we in our sin are full of ego pride insecurity greed and envy but God comes to free us from these things in Jesus incarnation we see God's initiation towards us even when we were enemies in the shed blood of Christ we see the way that God can offer us the forgiveness of sin by bearing the penalty for our sin by his death we see his love for us and by his resurrection we see the new life that he gives us the new heart and the new spirit where we who were once enemies are now welcomed as family and we who are far off have been brought near in

Christ and in this new heart and new spirit in this new life we have we are able to be in increasing measure more and more like him making peace for the gospel that we proclaim is a gospel of peace peace with God first and foremost and then as peacemakers in this world and friends when we are like this we are called chips off the old block sons of God the God who is the one who made peace blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God let's pray Lord Jesus we thank you for this word Lord it is searching if we are honest Lord we pray that you would allow it to search our hearts today

Lord if there are places where we need to go and initiate reconciliation Lord will you show us these things Lord if there are any here this morning who don't know peace with you who haven't put their faith in Christ I pray this morning that they would know that Jesus your blood is enough and your death is enough that by trusting in you Lord they can have forgiveness of sin and eternal life and Lord I pray that as we go from here in our homes and our workplaces Lord will you make us peacemakers that others might see a little bit of what kind of God you are we pray this in Jesus name Amen