

PROFILE OF DISCIPLESHIP

V. "The Blessing of Peacemaking"

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Mtt. 5:1-12

Text: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." (9)

You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family. (Msg)

INTRODUCTION

Abraham Lincoln, in his law practice before becoming president, was once hired by a man to sue someone else who owed him \$2.50. Back in the 1850's that wasn't exactly a piddling amount, but not that major either. Lincoln didn't want to take the case, but the man was adamant. So, Abe asked for a \$10.00 retainer fee up front, which his client readily paid. Abe then took the \$10.00 and gave \$5.00 to the man owing the debt who in turn promptly paid the \$2.50 to the man he owed the money to. Abe reported that everyone was happy.

We could use a few more Abraham Lincolns today! Conflict, whether at a personal level or between nations is always tragic. Winning is only relative, for all suffer and there are no real winners in a conflict. In destroying the other person, we end up destroying a part of ourselves as well. On the other hand, everyone wins when an ugly situation filled with tension is replaced by peace, understanding, harmony and love.

So much of our world is embroiled in seemingly endless conflict. Is there any answer to the boiling hatred in places like Iraq between various factions and against the United States? And, the very nation where the Prince of Peace was born and lived, teaching the way of peace, is under ceaseless attack by those convinced they are obeying their god by killing Jews in any way they possibly can. Hatred is strong and bullying its way across our world. Peace and love often seem to lose out.

However, we need to start closer to home to begin the peace process— to begin this way of peacemaking. Everyone of us has this calling. We see strained relationships around us. And many of us probably have some people we're not getting along with. Probing our hearts, we can find anger and resentment in them toward someone. There are people we don't want to see do well— people we still need to forgive.

How do we bring harmony to the discord of our personal relationships?

- How can we become peacemakers— agents of healing in our broken, messed up world?
- What does Jesus teach us in this beatitude?

We need to begin, first of all, with understanding just what Jesus really means by peace. Then,

we'll look at how we need to have peace within in order to have peaceful relationships. Finally, we'll examine the difficult calling of peacemaking.

THE NATURE OF PEACE

"Peace" is an important word in the Bible and a key word in Jesus' life and ministry. The Hebrew word most often used for this is *shalom*. It was customarily used as both a greeting and goodbye—bracketing that encounter with peace, *shalom*. But *shalom* is much deeper than what we often think of as “peace.” It is much more than the absence of conflict. *Shalom* means perfect welfare, serenity, fulfillment, and liberation from anything that hinders contentment. It conveys a kind of inner wholeness, well-being, "at-rest-ness" or peace. Another appropriate image is that of a circle with a person in the center equally relating to all points around the circumference. *Shalom* is comprehensive well-being in every direction—right relations with the whole world, with ourselves and with God. To bring peace in Scripture is to bring community. Peacemakers are reconcilers. If the circle breaks, peacemakers join it back together. “Peacemakers” could be translated “wholemakers.”

How is peace/ *shalom* achieved? True, enduring peace comes only through Jesus Christ. Eph. 2:14 tell us that "He is our peace." One of the prophetic titles for Jesus is, "Prince of peace (Is. 9:6)." Jesus says, “Go in peace,” both to sinners He’s forgiven and to people He has healed—encompassing spiritual and physical wellness. After the resurrection, “Peace be with you” are the first words spoken to the disciples. Dr. Lloyd Oglivie summarizes it, saying:

“Peace is a key word in Jesus’ life and ministry.

- He came to establish it,
- His message explained it,
- his death purchased it,
- and His resurrected presence enables it.”

The early church is characterized in Acts 10:36 as “Preaching peace by Jesus Christ.”

Peace must always begin as an inside job. Many of the hostilities are due to hearts that are in turmoil. Our inner frustration and dissonance finds outward expression. If you are crabby, feeling mad at the world, it isn’t long before that slips out in some harsh words, some put-downs, or some criticism that breeds conflict. If we’re not happy, if we’re not at peace inside, then things will not be at peace in our relationships with others.

Getting our hearts right is at the core of living at peace with others. James diagnoses the problem quite accurately when he writes,

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. (James 4:1-2)

Most of our conflicts come back to some version of “what I want vs. what you want” or “my way vs. your way.” And, most conflicts could be solved if both parties were willing to give up their personal desires and go instead with what Christ wants in that situation.

Apart from Christ, we'll never have inner peace. We are all born with hearts in revolt against God. Jesus came to restore peace with God through His shed blood on the cross (Eph. 2:20). When we accept that, and by faith make Christ's death the atonement for our sins, we enter into peace with God. Our surrendered hearts are no longer at odds with His purposes for us. Jesus, as Prince of Peace, reigns on the throne of our hearts, uniting our inner, scattered forces. Col. 3:15 emphasizes this saying, "*Allow the peace of God to rule in your hearts.*" "Rule" is used here like an umpire calling the shots, giving order to chaos within.

Also, knowing His unconditional forgiveness enables us to forgive ourselves. We no longer need to struggle to be what we think we ought to be to be accepted. Proving ourselves and winning are no longer an obsession. We have a peace deep within our hearts knowing God's unconditional love. Remember, I've talked about a subtle progression in these beatitudes. It is no accident that this follows, "Blessed are the pure in heart." Our hearts cleansed and motives purified enables us to have peace within. So, on a personal level we can say, "Happy or blessed are those who have made peace with God and with themselves, for they are sons of God."

MAKING PEACE WITH OTHERS

Jesus is telling us in this beatitude, peacemaking is part of our definition as Christians— what it means to be children of God. One of the main tools the Enemy uses is to cause conflict. He loves to sow dissonance in our relationships. Evil people throughout history have always caused the destruction of harmonious relationships. In the church, it is one of Satan's favorite strategies, disrupting community and causing division. Families are ripped apart by disagreements. Often the issue that begins it all is ridiculously trivial.

You may have heard Ron Hutchcraft a couple of months ago in one of his "A Word With You" commentaries on the radio mention the "Pig War" between the United States and Great Britain. Most of us haven't heard of it because it is one that almost started but was averted. This "almost war" began just a couple hundred miles from here on one of the San Juan Islands. There was a dispute about some of these islands, whether they belonged to Canada or the State of Washington. In 1859, an American settler, Lyman Cutler, on one of the disputed islands shot a pig that was rooting through his potato patch. The pig belonged to Englishman Charles Griffin. This is of course serious if it is your potato patch and if it is your pig that gets shot. But is it worth a war between two nations? The incident was like a match to a powder keg in an already inflamed situation. For twelve years, the tensions continued over this pig, threatening war between two nations. Finally, General Winfield Scott brokered a peace deal averting war.

How often do we let something of relative minor importance disrupt and destroy something of *real* importance? I've seen family members estranged for years over a thoughtless comment or an irresponsible act. Isn't the relationship between that brother and sister of far greater value than the little hurt of the offense? But we tend to let little hurts grow and fester, until they destroy something beautiful and *really* important. Most of us who are married know how easy it is for things that are almost silly if we were to tell about them, can become a burr under the saddle, and end up growing into serious conflict if not taken care of early on.

In our calling as peacemakers, we must first of all operate by Godly means in any conflict. That means refusing gossip, talking behind people's backs, slander, jealousy, or any other of a host of sinful tendencies. Vengeance is never appropriate. Forgiveness is always required. Of course that doesn't mean we just simply become doormats for others. Jesus is our example, and I certainly don't see Him as a doormat. There are places to make stands and times when consequences need to be in place. But we still must forgive. Justice, fairness, and forgiveness are not incompatible. Forgiveness is a bigger subject than we can do justice to here, but we need to keep in mind that making peace with others often requires us to first of all forgive them in our heart.

Please note the verses on the back of the bulletin about our calling to peace.

- Romans 12:18– *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*
- Romans 14:19– *Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification.*
- 1 Peter 3:11b– *...seek peace and pursue it.*

These let us know there is choice and effort involved. The path of peace with others is something we need to work at.

Peacemakers are called to take the initiative when there's a problem. Generally each person in a broken relationship feels the other is at fault and should make the first move. If that's the case, nothing happens. God took the initiative with us in healing our broken relationship with Him, even though we were entirely at fault. In Jesus and the cross we see God's huge move toward us to restore us. This reconciliation is the basis of our call to become agents of reconciliation as 2 Cor. 5:19-20 reminds us. Listen to The Message paraphrase of this:

God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you.

I recall a scene from my first pastorate. Every Sunday night in that small town, we had a community vesper service with all four churches coming together. We rotated among the churches as well as took turns preaching. On this Sunday night, we were at the Methodist church. There were two people in that church I knew that had a falling out over the music— the older organist and a young woman, Brenda, very gifted musically who had recently started coming. The preacher gave a good message on reconciliation. Brenda and the organist were on opposite sides of the church. After the benediction, I saw Brenda get up and start across the church and I knew she was going to go and make peace with the organist. However, the organist saw it too and literally began to run to the back of the church to escape. She was a rather heavy set woman and stumbled over the edge of a pew, almost falling flat in her flight. I thought, "How sad, how tragic, and how ridiculous!" They both loved the Lord and wanted to serve Him. Why insist on hanging onto hurt? Our taking the initiative may not always be successful, but the Lord is always pleased when we make the effort.

Before you go to the other person to make peace, examine your own heart. Let go of any pride, any self-pity, any resentments, any selfishness, and any wrong motives. Confess your sins to the Lord so you can go as a clear channel of His grace. Rarely will we find after such a self-examination that we are totally without any fault. Relinquish your “rights” in this situation. The main thing is not determining who is right and who is wrong—reconciliation is more important. We can leave the sorting-out of blame with the Lord. Phil. 2:6 in telling us our attitude should be like Christ’s says, [He] *did not cling to his rights... but humbled himself*. Remembering that is a good beginning. As you prepare yourself in prayer, let the Holy Spirit begin pouring in love and empathy for the other person. Then you can go and share honestly and in love. If we go in humility, free of demands and criticism, accepting the other person where they are, God will use this in restoring the relationship. Remember Romans 12:18 we just read says, *as far as it depends on you...* Taking these actions is the *as far as it depends on you* part. Reconciliation is not guaranteed, but your heart will be free.

A pastor, Steve Goodier, writes about an incident when his son, Rob, was eleven years-old. He came home in tears saying a couple of older kids had beat him up at the bus stop. Rob wanted to stay home from school so he wouldn’t have to face those boys again. When Steve called the school, they offered to call the parents of the boys and advised Steve to call the police. Steve said they wanted to think it over first. The next day was Saturday, and Rob happened to look out the window and said in alarm, “There are the boys who beat me up!” They were just standing in front of the house as if they were just waiting for Rob to step outside. Steve said he immediately began to rehearse what he wanted to say to these boys, but his wife, Bev, acted first. She opened the door and said with a smile, “Hi guys. Would you like some ice cream?” They looked at each other in puzzlement. But they were teenaged boys, so they shrugged their shoulders and one of them said, “Sure, why not?”

Bev promptly introduced herself, Rob’s younger brothers, Steve, and even Rusty the dog. “And I think you already know Rob,” she said. She wanted them to see Rob as a person with a family and friendly dog, not just a target. She went on to say, “I know there’s been some trouble at the bus stop. I think there may be a misunderstanding.” They nodded in agreement. She continued, “Rob wants to be your friend, maybe we can talk about the misunderstanding so you can all be friends.” The boys mumbled their apologies and agreed there would be no more trouble.

CONCLUSION

High in the Andes Mountains on the boundary between Argentina and Chile, there is bronze statue of Christ fashioned from old cannons. Engraved on the base of the statue is, “Sooner shall these mountains crumble into dust than Argentines and Chileans break the peace sworn at the feet of Christ the Redeemer.” Blessed are those who create monuments of peace at troublesome boundaries, for they shall be called children of God—brothers and sisters of the Prince of Peace.

Don’t stay imprisoned in your hurt, your anger, your estrangement. Jesus has a way for every conflict to be healed. Following His way will at least release you, even if the other person refuses to accept that path. Blessed are the peacemakers. God is revealed in an unprecedented way in our actions in making peace.