

17 A BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

(by Paul)

Setting: a hillside in Judea

Speaker: Rabbi Jesus of Nazareth

Audience: Jesus' disciples (and ourselves as well, if we're following Jesus)

Context: the Beatitudes, first section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount

These are the attitudes of the follower of Christ. This is part of the Constitution of Christ's new kingdom. These are the paths to the happiness everyone seeks. These are natural steps of progress in the Christian life. These are the secrets of blest living, the responses that bring the applause of Heaven.

And Jesus taught them, saying,

"...Blessed (fortunate, favored by God, outrageously happy) are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God..." (Matthew 5:9)

We recall the announcement of the angels at the time of Christ's birth: "Glory to God in the highest. Peace on earth. Good will to men." (Luke 2:14) Yes, this is integral to the Good News, but in our more cynical moments we may look around at the world and wonder, "Where is the peace?"

Our hearts yearn for peace, for an end to conflict, destruction, and death, for relations even in families that are upbuilding instead of destructive. We think of the question of Rodney King, made famous on a Time magazine cover; "Why can't we all just get along?"

Many have tried to bring about peace by human efforts-

- Marches, signs, and slogans (You know you're from a different generation when your kid look at pictures of protests and wonder why all those people were carrying Mercedes Benz symbols.)
- Meditation for peace
- Urging universal disarmament
- Possibly changing from armed conflict to international games (chess, marbles, tug-of-peace).

Unfortunately, none of these efforts were successful. In spite of our scientific advances the last century was the bloodiest century in the history of mankind.

"If all the people who really wanted to end war got together, the first thing they would do is fight over the best way to end war." [1]

In spite of our efforts we expect there to be conflicts and the need for armies until the Lord draws the curtain on history.

In fact, our concept of peace as the absence of war is too restrictive. The Hebrew word for peace is SHALOM. It's the word that Israeli people use to greet each other. SHALOM means much more than the absence of conflict.

It entails

- Peace
- Safety
- Health
- Wholeness
- Good-will
- Harmony

We also need to realize that all of the Beatitudes are spiritual as well as attitudinal. Mere human effort won't work.

Our natural inclination would be to declare, "Blessed are the warriors, the conquerors, the winners at any cost, for they shall boast of their wins."

Why the conflict?

James 4 tells us: "What is the source of fighting and conflict 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..."

Do we understand the depth of our rebellion?

- We are incredibly selfish.
- We use other people for our own ends, people that God made and loves.
- We don't naturally seek God or love Him above all else.
- We don't love His commandments- we break His laws.
- We suppress His truth in unrighteousness. (Rom. 1:18)

Into this darkness came Jesus the Son of God, to die on a cross as the enemy of the state, but to die in our place as the payment for our sins.

Jesus came so that anyone who receives Him might have divine forgiveness, a new life, a new status as a child of God, and true SHALOM, peace with God.

"Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom. 5:1)

If you have never surrendered to Him, your greatest enemy is God! Yet He is also the One who loves you most.

“Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world [system and values] becomes an enemy of God.” (James 4:4)

“If while we were His enemies, God loved us, how much more shall we be saved from wrath through Him.” (Rom. 5:9-10)

The result is that “inner peace” that people seek.

“Peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you,” said Jesus. (John 14:27)

“You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is fixed on You.” (Isa. 26:3)

We desperately need Jesus, the Prince of Peace. A peacemaker’s starting point is having peace with God.

Once we have forgiveness we have a both a duty and a desire to spread real peace.

As God takes you through the school of the Beatitudes,

If you’ve been made poor in spirit,

You’ve mourned over lostness or conflict;

You’ve hungered for God’s righteousness;

Your heart is pure- no ulterior motives.

Now you’re prepared to be a peacemaker.

1. A peacemaker seeks to reconcile others to God.

“We are ambassadors for Christ...Be reconciled to God.” (2 Cor. 5:18-21)

2. A peacemaker takes deliberate steps to live at peace with others.

You can’t be effective as a peacemaker if you’re a troublemaker, a sower of discord, or a warmonger.

“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” (Rom. 12:18)

This verse is very realistic. It’s not always possible to live at peace, but we must make every effort on our part to do so.

- Pray about every significant interaction.
- Speak the truth in love. (Eph. 4:15) Much misunderstanding arises from a failure to communicate.
- If a brother or sister offends you, go to them. (Matthew 18:15)
- If you need to, leave your gift at the altar (or offering envelope on the pew) and go to be reconciled to your brother. (Mt 5:24)

- Stand strongly for truth, but don't insist on your personal agenda.
- Learn to handle your anger. Be angry and sin not. (Eph. 4:26)
- Don't let the sun go down on your anger. (Eph. 4:26) Handle the problem that day.
- If you disagree or lose, don't carry a grudge.
- Enjoy healthy competition, but don't love a fight.
- If you know what triggers another person's anger, don't deliberately push their buttons.
- Focus your efforts on the problem, not against the other person.
- Never-ever-plot revenge.

All of this hinges on believing in and trusting in the goodness and sovereignty of God. If God is our shield and provider, we don't have to fight for ourselves.

3. Remember that no human being is your ultimate enemy.

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Eph. 6:12)

4. A peacemaker seeks to reconcile others.

"Peacemaking: the ability to harmonize differences between others without causing either person to 'lose'." [2] (L. Coleman)

"Peacemaker: I have come to the place where I really work at keeping the channels of communication open between me and those around me. I deal with anger and disagreements immediately and don't allow them to fester. I encourage those around me to work out their differences without hurting one another." [3] (L. Coleman)

5. A peacemaker may need to mediate between warring/conflicting parties.

Sometimes we need to put out the fire, to defuse the bomb...

6. The ultimate step for a peacemaker is to forgive and bless his or her enemies.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to 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." (Matt. 5:43-45)

The world can't explain or duplicate this.

What kind of reconciling love does God show? He takes His enemies and makes them His family.

Examples-

(1) Stephen

In Acts 6 and 7 we read about a disciple named Stephen whose peacemaking activities were costly. When he was brought before the Sanhedrin by his enemies, Stephen preached a great sermon...to them. How do we know it was a great sermon? It resulted in great persecution and great prayer. And when Stephen died (for he was stoned by the Jews because of his sermon) what was he doing? Making peace and praying for his enemies. In Acts 8:1 we read that Saul of Tarsus was witness to all these things. No doubt Saul's heart was touched, and eventually he was made able to surrender himself totally to Jesus Christ, as we read in Acts 9. [4]

(2) Jacob DeShazer

As part of Jimmy Doolittle's squadron, Jacob DeShazer was an American pilot shot down with his crew off the coast of Japan in 1942. He spent three years in a prison camp near Tokyo under wretched conditions. In that prison camp DeShazer read a Bible-and his life was changed.

After the war ended he was determined-not to exact revenge on his enemies, but to win the people of Japan to Christ.

When the time came to be released from the prison camp DeShazer wrote this:

I felt certain I would be able to return to the United States...It was a wonderful feeling not to harbor any resentment or ill will toward any one. I felt love for the Japanese people and a deep interest in their welfare. I felt that we were all made by the same God and that we must share our hardships and our happiness together. How I wished that I could tell the Japanese people about Jesus! I knew that my savior would be their Savior, too! I realized that Jesus died for our sins, that He was alive today and that although He died so that He might become our Savior, He is coming back again to reign as our King forever and ever. Jesus was as real and alive as anyone could possibly be. [5]

De Shazer enrolled in Bible classes and returned to Japan in December, 1948 as a missionary.

One young man who read his testimony was a Japanese pilot named Mitsuo Fuchida. Fuchida had led the bombing raid on Pearl Harbor that initiated America's involvement in the Second World War. It was his voice over the radio that called out "Tora! Tora! Tora!" as the fleet was attacked.

After the war Fuchida was a lonely and broken man. DeShazer's testimony was the first link in bringing him to Christ. He loved his former enemies. Eventually Mitsuo Fuchida became a believer and an evangelist, bring the message of Christ's forgiving love to others around the world. In 1950 Fuchida and DeShazer both gave their testimonies at a huge meeting in Osaka. [6]

(3) Ambon

Another powerful example is the Christian community of Ambon, a small island in Indonesia. Some have died proclaiming the message of Christ. Some have been miraculously spared. Believers responded with relief for all after a deadly tsunami in 2004.

There is a third kind of miracle to go along with the way Christians die and the way they are delivered. It's the way Christians forgive. This may be the greatest miracle of all.

Pastor Arthur explains, "We have a burden to gather clothes, food, and medicine for the Muslims of Wakal village who killed our brothers. They are now isolated, they cannot bring their produce to market, and are suffering. Perhaps this is our opportunity to show the love of Christ for them."

How amazing, that Christians can find a supernatural love to bring relief to the killers of their brethren. This is God's doing, because such love cannot come from within...

Only this kind of forgiving love, manifested in greater and greater degree, will win over our enemies, break down intolerance, and bring peace to this ravaged land. [7]

The world is in desperate need of peacemakers.

Becoming a peacemaker doesn't make you a child of God, but it can show the world that you are a child of God.

References

1. Attributed to George Gurdjeff
2. Coleman, L., "Beatitudes," in *Serendipity New Testament for Groups*, Serendipity House, 1990.
3. Ibid.
4. "Kingdom Norms 7: Peacemakers,"
www.dcn.davis.ca.us/~gvcc/sermon_trans/1997/Kingdom_Norms_7.html
5. Watson, C. H., *DeShazer: The Doolittle Raider Who Turned Missionary*, Light and Life Press, 1950, p.122.
6. Watson, p. 169.
7. *Indonesia's Christians*, Open Doors report, 2004.