



Ministry of the Word
Sunday 12th August 2020
by Vincent Gannon

Scripture: Matthew 5: 9

Subject: Part 21 - **Peacemakers - The Children of the King**

Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.

Recently the death of John Hume was announced on our national news. This Derry Man was a former member of the British Parliament, yet was hailed as a peace-maker in a time when our country was torn apart by violence and sectarianism. One reporter noted that the peace made in the land at that time was very 'fragile'. Yet, this shouldn't take from the work that this man had achieved with many others, to bring about the political agreement known as the 'Good Friday Peace Agreement', so that a generation once again could grow up knowing peace in this land. No small achievement when you consider all the differences there are between the various parties in the North!

We know that the world is at war, in so many different ways, not just nation against nation, but religion against religion, one ethnic group against another, ideas against each other, and the list goes on. Humanity for the most part is at war with God! As well as at war with each other!

So is this verse alluding to this sort of conflict? And who are these peacemakers? Does it mean that if you bring this kind of peace then it means you can be called a son of God? The answer is definitely no. Nor could it be, even if you got the Nobel Peace Prize. So, just like all the other beatitudes, we need to ask the same question - *what is this really about?*

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One of the grand titles of God in Scripture is The God of Peace. For example: Romans 15:33 says ***“Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.”*** and also you can read it in 2 Corinthians 13:11 and Philippians 4:9. Do you also realise that peace is not only cherished but it is also an elusive reality in this world? However, the Lord has made it one of the main themes in His Word. The Bible contains over 400 direct references to peace, and many, many more indirect ones. As you know, the Bible opens up with a perfect peace in the Garden of Eden, and it closes with the assurances that all in Christ will have perfect peace in eternity in the Book of Revelation. In between the covers of those two books there is a lot of trouble and turmoil brought about by the sin of man. The reality and truth of that is still with us today.

Yet, Jesus Christ on the Cross made peace a reality again, for anyone who trusts in Him, He becomes their peace. Peace can now begin to reign in their hearts and lives, and one day He will come as the Prince of Peace and with Him, grant them eternal peace. On that day, the believers in Christ will no longer experience trials, troubles, wars or even rumours of wars.

Peace is not something that characterises man’s earthly existence. The combined fall of angels and man places us in the universal conditions we have today. Man cannot achieve peace because of the opposition of Satan and the disobedience of man. Both are engaged with the God of peace in a battle for sovereignty. Someone wrote the following words, ***“Peace is that glorious moment in history when everyone stops to reload”***.

This beatitude calls on God’s people to be peacemakers. It is a mission to help restore the peace that was lost on account of the Fall. The peace of which Christ speaks in this beatitude, and about which the rest of Scripture speaks, is unlike that which the world knows and strives for. Warren Wiersbe wrote: ***“This is not peace at any price, for holiness is more important than a peace based on sin (see James 3:17; Heb.12:14). Compromise is not peace, but Christians should not be contentious as they contend for the faith”*** (Wiersbe; *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament*; p.29).

God’s peace has nothing to do with politics, armies and navies, forums of nations, or even councils of churches. It has nothing to do with statesmanship, no matter how great, or with arbitration, compromise, negotiated truces, or treaties. God’s peace, the peace of which the Bible speaks, never evades issues; it knows nothing of peace at any price. It does not gloss over or hide sin, nor does it rationalise or excuse it. It confronts problems and seeks to solve

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them, and after the problems are solved it builds a bridge between those who were separated by the problems. It can often bring its own struggle, pain, hardship, and anguish, because often, such is the price of healing. It is not a peace that will be brought by kings, presidents, prime ministers, diplomats, or international humanitarians. It is the inner personal peace that only God can give to the soul of man and that only His children can exemplify. This peace is more than just the absence of conflict or antagonism, it is the presence of genuine righteousness and relationship (they shall be called the children of God!).

The Scriptures teach us four important realities about God's peace and they are as follows: Its meaning, its Maker, its messengers, and its merit.

1. The Meaning:

This is an important point not just for the believer to understand but also in helping to show the difference between the peace of man, which can be at any price and the peace of God, which incorporates righteousness and truth.

God's peace not only stops war but replaces it with the righteousness that brings harmony and true well-being. Only righteousness can produce the kind of relationship that puts warring parties together. John MacArthur wrote **"Men can stop fighting without righteousness, but they cannot live peaceably without righteousness. Righteousness not only puts an end to harm, but it administers the healing of love"** (MacArthur p. 211).

Peace is a creative and aggressive force for goodness. The Jewish greeting 'Shalom' is a wish of "peace", expressing the desire of all the righteousness and goodness God can give to the one being greeted. It's deepest meaning is "God's highest good to you."

At best, man's peace offers mostly a truce of some type, a temporary cessation of hostilities. Be it on an international scale or an individual scale, these types of truces are seldom more than a cold war. Unless disagreements and hatreds are fully resolved, the conflicts merely go underground where they tend to fester, grow, and break out again. God's peace, however, not only stops the hostilities but settles the issues and brings the parties together in mutual love and harmony. Only God can do this.

James confirms the nature of God's peace when he writes, **"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable"** (James 3:17). God's way to peace is through purity. Peace cannot

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be attained at the expense of righteousness. Two people cannot be at peace until they recognise and resolve the wrong attitudes and actions that caused the conflict between them, and then bring themselves to God for cleansing. This cleansing brings purity, and without it, God's peace can not be experienced.

Hebrews links peace with purity as we see in Hebrews 12 verse 14 which says: *"pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord"*. Peace cannot be divorced from holiness. *"Righteousness and peace have kissed each other"* is the beautiful expression of the psalmist in Psalm 85:10. Biblically speaking, then, where there is true peace there is righteousness, holiness, and purity. Trying to bring harmony by compromising righteousness, or holiness or purity forfeits everything, including peace.

Someone might say, *"did Jesus not say"*, *"Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword"* (Matthew 10:34) This seems to be the opposite of the seventh beatitude. His meaning, however, was that the peace He came to bring is not peace at any price. There will be opposition before there is harmony; there will be strife before there is peace. To be peacemakers on God's terms requires being peacemakers on the terms of truth and righteousness, to which the world is in fierce opposition to. When believers bring truth to bear on a world that loves falsehood, there will be strife. When believers set God's standards of righteousness before a world that loves wickedness, there is an inevitable potential for conflict. Yet, that is the only way to bring real peace, not fake serenity.

Until unrighteousness is changed to righteousness there cannot be godly peace. Let's not be under any illusion, the process of resolution is difficult and costly. Truth will produce anger before it produces happiness; righteousness will produce antagonism before it produces harmony. The gospel brings bad feelings before it can bring good feelings. A person who does not first mourn over his own sin will never be satisfied with God's righteousness. The sword that Christ brings is the sword of His Word, which is the sword of truth and righteousness. Like the surgeon's scalpel, it must cut before it heals, because true peace cannot come where sin remains. There can be no peace in a life dominated by sin, for any individuals, and yes, even for believers.

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Sin is the great enemy of peace because it separates men from God. It causes disharmony and enmity with Him. Men's lack of harmony with God causes their lack of harmony with each other. The world is filled with strife and war because it is filled with sin. Peace does not rule the world because the enemy of peace rules the world. Jeremiah in chapter 17 verse 9 tells us that *"the heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick or wicked"*. True peace cannot reign where wickedness reigns. Wicked hearts cannot produce a peaceful society. *"There is no peace for the wicked"* says the Lord in Isaiah 48:22.

To talk of peace without talking of repentance of sin is to talk foolishly and vainly. The corrupt religious leaders of ancient Israel proclaimed, *"Peace, peace,"* but there was no peace, because they and the rest of the people were not *"ashamed of the abominations they had done"* (Jeremiah 8:11-12).

Turn to Mark 7 verse 21 to 23 and it says *"From within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man"*.

Sinful men cannot create peace, either within themselves or among themselves. Sin can produce nothing but strife and conflict. James Chapter 3 verse 16 to 18 tells us

"For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing, But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace".

Regardless of what the circumstances are, wherever there is conflict it is because of sin. If you separate the conflicting parties from each other but do not separate them from sin, at best you will succeed only in making a truce. Peace cannot be experienced by ignoring or bypassing sin, because sin is the source of every conflict. Until a person faces his false notions, it makes no sense to offer him the truth. We know that before we became Christians and made peace with God, we had to confront our sin and know our lost condition before we could see our great need of Jesus our Saviour.

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Believers cannot afford the luxury of pretending that truth does not exist because it does. God is a God of peace because He is righteous. And because He is righteous he does not avoid the truth; God must confront lies. If someone is in serious error about any part of God's truth, then he cannot have a true peaceful relationship with others until that error is confronted and corrected, just as much as if someone is living in serious sin. Jesus never evaded the issue of wrong doctrine or behaviour. Jesus never avoided the issues of sin. Later in Matthew's Gospel we will see Jesus deal with some pretty heavy arguments. Jesus did not avoid the issue of the Samaritan woman at the well who was living with her boyfriend (John 4). He lovingly confronted her with her immoral living and corrected her false ideas about worship and then told her the truth about himself. It was only then that she could experience real peace with God.

We need to be like Jesus, we need to be willing to confront lovingly and patiently, but we still need to confront. If we witness to people by appeasing them, trying not to offend them and thereby compromising God's word, then they are more likely to be not just left in their sin, but possibly further away from God. To come to terms on anything less than God's truth and righteousness, is really to settle for a truce which only confirms sinners in their sin and may leave them even further from the kingdom. God's peace comes only in God's way and godliness, righteousness, truth and purity are not sacrificed. Being a peacemaker is essentially the result of a holy life and the call to others to embrace the gospel of holiness.

Perhaps the next point I could easily be accused of stating the obvious. *But is it that obvious?*

2. The Maker of Peace is God

Men are without real true peace when they are without God, who is the source of peace. Both the Old and New Testaments are full with statements of God's being the God of peace (Leviticus 26:6; 1 Kings 2:33; Psalms 29:11; Isaiah 9:6; Ezekiel 34:25; Romans 15:33; 1 Corinthians 14:33; 2 Thessalonians 3:16). Since the Fall, the only peace men have known is the peace they have received as the gift of God. Christ's coming to earth was the peace of God coming to earth, because only Jesus Christ could remove sin, the great barrier to peace. Paul states, *"But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace"* (Ephesians 2:13-14).

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In an infinitely greater way, Christ reconciles God and man, bringing peace. Colossians chapter 1 verse 19 and 20 says *“For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross”*.

How could the Cross bring peace? Because at the Cross, all of man’s hatred and anger was vented against God. On the Cross, the Son of God was mocked, cursed, spit upon, pierced, reviled, and killed. Jesus’ disciples fled in fear, the sky flashed lightning, the earth shook violently, and the veil of the Temple was torn in two. Yet through that violence, God brought peace. God’s greatest righteousness confronted man’s greatest wickedness, and righteousness won; and because righteousness won, peace was won.

There is a very moving story in Don Richardson’s book “The Peace Child”, who by the way was a missionary to a cannibalistic, headhunting tribe of people known as the Sawi in the jungles of Indonesia. For a long time he tried, without any success, to make the people understand the Gospel message of Christ’s atoning death. These villagers were constantly fighting among themselves. Revenge and murder was highly honoured. There seemed no hope of ever reaching them, until the missionary learned that they had an old custom, that if one village gave a baby boy to the other village, there would be peace as long as the boy lived. The child was known as the peace child. Seeing that, he began to preach the message of how God gave His son to us as a divine peace child, and because He will never die neither will His peace. Many came to the Lord for salvation as God used their custom to unlock their minds and hearts, and so peace came to the Sawis.

The Father is the source of peace, the Son is the manifestation of that peace, and the Holy Spirit is the agent of that peace. One of the most beautiful fruits the Holy Spirit gives to those in whom He resides is the fruit of peace (Galatians 5:22). The God of peace sent the Prince of Peace who sends the Spirit of peace to give the fruit of peace. No wonder the Trinity is called Yahweh Shalom, *“The Lord is Peace”* (Judges 6:24).

The God of peace intends peace for His world, and the world that He created in peace, He will one day restore to peace. The Prince of Peace will establish His kingdom of peace, for a thousand years on earth and for all eternity in heaven. God wants you, his child to experience peace even now. Jeremiah 29:11 says *“For I know the plans that I have for you, declares*

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the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope'" In John 16 verse 33 Jesus said, *"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world"*. Only those who belong to God through Jesus Christ can have peace and be a peacemaker. God can work peace through us only if He has firstly worked peace in us. Those who are in the best of circumstances but without God can never find peace, but those in the worst of circumstances but with God need never lack peace.

This brings us to point 3. The Messengers of Peace: The Believers

Only those who belong to the Maker of peace can be messengers of peace. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 7 verse 15 that *"God has called us to peace"* and in 2 Corinthians 5 verse 18 that *"now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation"*. Reconciliation means restoration, it's bringing together two parties that are at difference with each other. We were at war with God because of our sin, but Christ reconciled us to God through himself. Therefore, we are at peace with God. The ministry of reconciliation is the ministry of peace-making. Those whom God has called to peace, He also calls to make peace. As verse 20 of 2 Corinthians 5 tells us *"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God."* Therefore, we who are in Christ are to spread his message of peace - we are to lace up those sandals of preparation of the gospel of peace. (Eph 6)

What are the marks that characterise a true peace-maker.

First, A true peacemaker has already made peace with God. Peace is always corrupted by sin, therefore, the peace-making believer must be a holy believer and one whose life is continually being cleansed by the Holy Spirit. Sin breaks our fellowship with God, and when fellowship with Him is broken, peace is broken. The disobedient, self-indulgent Christian is not suited to be an ambassador of peace.

Secondly, a pacemaker leads others to make peace with God. As we have been given God's peace, we are called to share God's peace. Christians are not an elite group of people who have spiritually arrived and who look down on the rest of the world. They are a body of sinners cleansed by Jesus Christ and commissioned to carry His gospel of cleansing to the rest

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of the world. That is why we are to have our feet ready with “the gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15).

This is such a different calling than the world and it’s religions. We are called to share the gospel of peace and to do so with humility, gentleness, love and the gospel of peace calls for sorrow over its own sin, hunger for righteousness, mercy and purity of heart. G. Campbell Morgan commented *“that peace-making is the propagated character of the man who, exemplifying all the rest of the beatitudes, thereby brings peace wherever he comes”*.

Remember, the peacemaker is a beggar who has been fed and who is called to help feed others. Having been brought to God, he is to bring others to God. The purpose of the church is to preach *“peace through Jesus Christ”* (Acts 10:36). To preach Christ is to promote true peace. To bring a person to saving knowledge of Jesus Christ is the most peacemaking act a human being can perform. It is beyond what any diplomat or statesman can accomplish. For this peace works from the inside out.

Thirdly, the peacemaker enables people to make peace with each other. Not only is a true biblical believer at peace with God, but he will also be at peace with the true church and becomes a peacemaker in the world. A Peacemaker builds reconciliation bridges, with all people, believers and non-believers in as much as that is within their power. Jesus said that if we are bringing a gift to God and a brother has something against us, we are to leave our gift at the altar and be reconciled to that brother before we offer the gift to God (Matthew 5:23-24). As far as it is possible, Paul says, *“so far as it depends on us,” we are to “be at peace with all men”* (Romans 12:18). We are even to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, *“in order that we may be sons of our Father who is in heaven”* (Matthew 5:44-45).

We know by definition a bridge cannot be one-sided, both sides must be extended and supported or it will collapse. As a believer, our first responsibility is to ensure that our side is secure and safe, we have the correct foundation and intention, we need for a solid base. Then we can help others. God’s peacemakers must first be righteous themselves, (not self-righteous).

The bridge-building process often involves rebuking sin, which is the supreme barrier to peace. *“If your brother sins,”* Jesus says, *“go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you,*

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you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church” (Matthew 18:15-17).

That can be a difficult thing to do, especially in love but obeying that command is no more optional than obeying any other of the Lord’s commands. Taking such action often stirs up controversy and resentment, but that is no excuse for not doing it. When we are obedient to the Lord and do it in the spirit that He teaches, then consequences are His responsibility. If we don’t do it, then true peace is not preserved, for it can never be through disobedience which would only establish a truce with sin.

Obviously there is the possibility of a price to pay, but any sacrifice is small in order to obey God. Often confrontation will bring more turmoil instead of less— misunderstanding, hurt feelings, and resentment. Yet, the only way to peace is the way of righteousness. Sin that is not dealt with, is sin that will disrupt and destroy peace, even if it is eventually. Just as any price is worth paying to obey God, any price is worth paying to be rid of sin.

“If your right eye makes you stumble,” Jesus said, “tear it out, and throw it from you; . . . And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell” (Matthew 5:29-30).

If we are unwilling to help others confront their sin, how do you think we will be able to help them find true peace, with God and with others.

Now Fourthly, a peacemaker endeavours to find a point of agreement. God’s truth and righteousness must never be compromised or weakened, but there is hardly a person so ungodly, immoral, rebellious, pagan, or indifferent that we have absolutely no point of agreement with him. Wrong theology, wrong standards, wrong beliefs, and wrong attitudes must be faced and dealt with, but if we are wanting to start the process of witnessing or peace-making, these faults are not usually the best place to start.

Now you may think that I’m stating the obvious, but I’m going to say it anyway, God’s people are to contend without being contentious, to disagree without being disagreeable, and to confront without being abusive, they are to be peace-makers not peace-fakers. It’s about

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winning the soul, not the argument. The peace-maker speaks the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), that can be very hard at times. Love often begins the road towards peace. We begin peace-making by starting with whatever peaceful point of agreement we can find. Peace helps beget peace. Sometimes, the peacemaker needs to give others the benefit of doubt, for example, never assume a person will resist the gospel. However, when a peacemaker meets opposition, they try to be patient with other people's blindness and stubbornness just as they know the Lord was, and continues to be, patient with them.

God's most effective peacemakers are often unknown to the world. They don't try to attract attention to themselves, because it's not about them, it's about God. Ironically, because peacemakers bring righteousness and truth wherever they go, they are frequently accused of being troublemakers and disturbers of the peace, for example; Ahab accused Elijah of being a troublemaker (1 Kings 18:17) and the Jewish leaders accused Jesus of being one also (Luke 23:2,5). Thankfully, God knows their hearts, and He honours their work because they are working for His peace, in His power, for His Glory. God's peacemakers are never unfruitful or unrewarded. This is a mark of a true kingdom citizen: he not only hungers for righteousness and holiness in his own life but has a passionate desire to see those virtues in the lives of others.

Now we come to the last important reality about God's peace and his peacemakers, which is **The Merit of Peace: Eternal Sonship in the Kingdom**

The merit, or result, of peace-making is utterly amazing! because it is an eternal blessing as God's children in God's kingdom. Peacemakers shall be called sons of God. Some of us are thankful for our heritage, our ancestors, our parents, and our family name. But the greatest human heritage cannot match the believer's heritage in Jesus Christ, because we are *"heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ"* (Romans 8:17). Jesus unites the concept of peace making and sonship! The central characteristic of God's Kingdom is peace. The wolf lives with the lamb; the leopard with the goat, the calf and the lion, and the yearling together, and the little child leads them (Isaiah 11:6); all because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross. Nothing compares to being a child of God.

Sons of God are two Greek words used in the New Testament to speak of believers' relationship to God. 'Teknon' (child) is a term of tender affection and endearment as well as

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of relationship (see John 1:12; Ephesians 5:8; 1 Peter 1:14;). Sons is from “*huios*”, which expresses the relationship of a child to his parents, which has both dignity and honour. As God’s peacemakers we are promised the glorious blessing of eternal sonship in His eternal kingdom. Peace-making is a hallmark of God’s children. The person who is continually disruptive, divisive, and quarrelsome has good reason to doubt his relationship to God altogether. God’s sons, that is, all of His children, both male and female are peacemakers. Only God determines who His children are, and He has determined that they are the humble, the penitent over sin, the gentle, the seekers of righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers.

The words ‘*Shall be called*’ in this verse is in a continuous future passive tense. Throughout eternity peacemakers will go by the name “children of God.” The passive form indicates that all heaven will call peacemakers, sons of God, because God Himself has declared them to be His children.

Jacob loved Benjamin so much that his whole life came to be bound up in the life of that son (Gen. 44:30). Any parent worthy of the name loves his children more than his own life, and immeasurably more than all of his possessions together. God loves His children today as He loved Israel of old, as “the apple of His eye” (Zech. 2:8; cf. Ps. 17:8). The Hebrew expression “apple of the eye” referred to the cornea, the most exposed and sensitive part of the eye, the part we are the most careful to protect. That is what God’s children are to Him: those whom He is most sensitive about and most desires to protect. To attack God’s children is to poke a finger in God’s eye. Offense against Christians is offense against God, because they are His very own children.

God records the tears of His children (Ps. 56:8). God cares for us so much that He notes their sorrows and afflictions, the big and little things. God’s children matter greatly to Him, and it is no little thing that we can call Him Father.

God’s peacemakers will not always have peace in the world. As Jesus makes clear by the last beatitude, persecution follows peace-making. In Christ we have forsaken the false peace of the world, and consequently, we often will not have peace with the world or in it. But as God’s children we may always have peace even while we are in the world—the peace of God, which the world cannot give and the world cannot take away. **Amen.**