

## BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

A retired couple was alarmed by the threat of nuclear war so they undertook a serious study of all the inhabited places on the globe. Their goal was to determine where in the world would be the place to be least likely affected by war. A place of ultimate security. They studied and traveled, traveled and studied. Finally they found the most remote, peaceful and safe place on earth. On Christmas they sent their pastor a card from their new home -- in the Falkland Islands. Just a few months later their "paradise" was soon turned into a war zone by the conflict between Great Britain and Argentina.

We are continuing in our series today Blessed, and we come to the seventh statement that Jesus makes;

Matt 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Notice that in the beatitudes there is a progression. A proper attitude of self (humility and brokenness) leads us to a correct attitude towards God (dependence and thirst). This in turn leads to a proper attitude towards others and the world (mercy and purity). This next beatitude also reflects our attitude towards others. We bring to others the peace that has been given us in Christ.

John 14:25 "All this I have spoken while still with you. 26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

The Oxford dictionary defines peace as quiet, calm, freedom from or absence of war. The world we live in today is in desperate need of peace and peacemakers. Ever since the fall, mankind has been at war. War with God, war with himself and war with one another. The events of the last few weeks have reminded us again so clearly that peace is important.

I want to suggest to you that there are 3 steps towards true and lasting peace:

1. Peace with God – peace I leave with you

In the Greek the word for peace is the word EIRENE (i-ray-nay) and comes from the root verb EIRO which means to join together. In this context, peace is not the absence of something but the joining together of something. Peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of grace.

Peace is not the absence of trouble, but the presence of God. -- J. Oswald Sanders

True peace begins with a relationship with Christ. It is only in Christ that we can find peace with God. Before Jesus went away he comforted His disciples by promising that His peace would remain – “Peace I leave with you”. He was leaving them in right relationship with himself. This relationship would last beyond the cross to eternity. When we ask Jesus to come into our hearts He gives the same promise to us – that through justification the relationship which we began will continue.

Rom 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through sin we were separated from God. That separation leads to a longing in the human heart. People try to fill that God shaped void with many things, but nothing will satisfy.

Without justification it is impossible to have real peace. Conscience forbids it. Sin is a mountain between a man and God, and must be taken away. The sense of guilt lies heavy on the heart and must be removed. Unpardoned sin will murder peace. The true Christian knows all this well. His peace arises from a consciousness of his sins being forgiven, and his guilt being put away. ... He has peace with God, because he is justified. -- J.C. Ryle

We see from the very beginning the effects of sin on our lives.

Gen 3:9 But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" 10 He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." 11 And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" 12 The man said, "The woman you put here with me -- she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.

Sin severed our relationship with God. The result was shame. Sin caused Adam to try to hide from God, and sin has been causing mankind to run from God ever since. The results of this broken relationship with God lead to fear (feeling naked) and blame (the woman YOU put here...) It all started with a broken relationship with God, so peace must begin with a restored relationship with God.

I heard the story of a missionary who was translating the Bible in a particular tribal language. He was trying to find a local word for peace but could not find one. At last, a native who was working with them found a combination of words that captured the concept - "a heart that sits down." When the heart sits down with Jesus, when we join with God through the sacrifice of his Son, only then there is peace.

## 2. Peace with ourselves – my peace I give you

When we have peace with God then we are able to make peace with ourselves. Feelings of insecurity, guilt and unforgiveness are all dealt with in the cross. It is only when we see ourselves through the eyes of God that we can truly understand who we really are. Paul understood the inner war of the soul that we all have within us:

Rom 7:22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 23 but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So many people are at war with themselves. They fight against who God created them to be. You have tall people wishing they were shorter. You have short people wishing they were taller. You have dark people buying creams to make themselves lighter and you have light people laying out in the sun to get darker. You have women trying to become men and men trying to become women. All this because we had run from God.

I once heard a comedian say "My therapist told me the way to achieve true inner peace is to finish what I start. So far today, I have finished 2 bags of chips and a chocolate cake. I feel better already." That is not how you find inner peace.

It is only in Christ that we can truly have peace with ourselves. Jesus gives us His sense of inner peace – "my peace I give you". As people we are not "good nothings" but "fallen somethings". We need to understand that God made us good and that He loves us despite our wrong choices. Peace rules the day when Christ rules the heart and mind.

If there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character. If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home. If there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation. If there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world. -- Chinese Proverb

First put yourself at peace, and then you may the better make others be at peace. A peaceful and patient man is of more profit to himself and to others, too, than a learned man who has no peace. -- Thomas a Kempis

In Jesus we not only have peace with who God created us, we also have peace with the circumstances that we find ourselves in.

In 2003 Bethany Hamilton was surfing off the coast of Hawaii, when she was attacked by a shark. In the accident she lost her left arm. But the tragedy did not stop her compassion or competitive spirit. She came back to surfing and has since competed in some the toughest surfing completions. In 2011 the movie "Soul Surfing" became an inspiration to millions, about courage and perseverance and faith in Christ no matter what the suffering or loss. In an interview Bethany said, "I'm looking forward to the future. I want to show the world that I still have a life, and that my life is filled with joy. I have an undying trust that God is taking care of me."

### 3. Peace with others – I do not give to you as the world gives

There are so many people today that are talking about peace, but the problem is that peace with others is impossible until you have peace with God and peace with self. Peace is not the absence of conflict, it is the presence of grace in conflict. Peace does not mean or avoiding all differences and ideals. It is not appeasement, or pretending conflict does not exist. It is not religious tolerance in saying "you believe what you want and I'll believe what I want".

The world's image of peace can be summed up by John Lennon's song Imagine.

Imagine there's no heaven It's easy if you try  
No hell below us Above us only sky  
Imagine all the people Living for today.

Imagine there's no countries It isn't hard to do  
Nothing to kill or die for And no religion, too  
Imagine all the people Living life in peace.

You may say I'm a dreamer But I'm not the only one  
I hope someday you'll join us And the world will be as one

Imagine no possessions I wonder if you can  
No need for greed or hunger A brotherhood of man  
Imagine all the people Sharing all the world... You...

This is the world's idea of peace. Simply remove everything that might cause conflict. That is impossible, because in doing so you must eliminate truth and settle for absolute relativism.

Jesus does not call us to turn our backs on truth. As Christians we are to speak the truth in love even when that means conflict will develop. When we are at peace with God and ourselves than we are in a

position to offer peace to others and be peacemakers in the world in which we live. Remember, peace is not found in the absence of something negative but in the presence of something positive.

Martin Luther King said: "True peace is not merely the absence of some negative force, tension or war, it is the presence of some positive force, justice, good will, brotherhood."

He also said that "Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction."

I believe that we are seeing elements of that descending spiral in our world today. Any group that incites division is part of the problem. Any group that concentrates on the problem and not the reconciliation and grace of Jesus just makes things worse. You cannot have peace around you until you have found peace with God above and have peace within.

Jesus says here "I do not give to you as the world gives." The peace that Jesus offers is not the same as what the world is offering.

When most people talk about peace today what they are really talking about is a truce. Peace is different. General McArthur said "A truce just says you don't shoot for awhile. Peace comes when the truth is known, the issue is settled, and the parties embrace each other and forgive each other."

Peace is not made at the council tables, or by treaties, but in the hearts of men. -- Herbert Hoover

I looked on Jesus and the dove of peace entered my heart. I looked at the dove of peace; and lo ... off he went. -- Corrie Ten Boom

As peacemakers we are called to shine forth the love and grace of Jesus to the world. As people find peace with God they will find peace in their hearts and ultimately with one another. As God's people we are called to be peacemakers, taking the message of peace with God into all the world.

What type of seed are you sowing. Are you a peacemaker? Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Whenever one of my girls does something right I think to myself, "she is a chip off the ole block. That girls is just like her father." Whenever they do something really dumb Naomi says "you get that from your father..." Either way, they are just like me.

Jesus is saying here that one way we know that we are a child of God is when we are peacemakers. We are never so much like God as when we seek peace. Jesus is not saying that we are blessed when we are peace loving, that just means we do not like confrontation. He is also not saying that we are blessed when we are peaceful, that just means you have no issues right now. Blessed are those that actively seek to resolve conflict.

Haden Robinson once wrote, "No peace will exist between nations until peace reigns in each country. And no country will have peace until peace dwells with the people. And no people will have peace until they surrender to the prince of peace."

Back on October 14 of 2012, a guy known as Fearless Felix jumped out of a helium balloon from in the stratosphere, over 39 km up. As he fell to the earth he hit speeds of 844 miles per hour, shattering the sound barrier in the process. It took him just over nine minutes to land. Over the years, he has made over 2,500 jumps. He told reporters afterwards that this was his last one.

He told the press, “When I was standing there on top of the world, you become so humble, you do not think about breaking records anymore, you do not think about gaining scientific data. The only thing you are thinking about is getting back down to earth alive. Sometimes we have to get really high to see just how small we are.”

While most of us will never have a chance to do what he did, nor would we want to, we can learn the same lesson. When we see how big God is, we can't help but be humbled. It's my prayer today that we'll go up high so that we can see how small we really are.

St. Francis of Assisi used to pray "Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace." I pray that God would continue to use us to make a difference in this world.