

Matthew 5:9 (1984 NIV)
Blessed Are the Peacemakers

Introduction

I believe every person in his/her right frame of mind will almost always desire peace rather than war. But peace always seems such an elusive thing even though it is desired so much by so many.

At the dawning of the 20th century, many had hailed it as the millennium of peace and prosperity. But WWI erupted and raged from 1914-18, and shattered this idealism. Some 30 million people perished in the war. To help avoid a repetition of this catastrophe, the League of Nations was founded in 1920, with the primary aim of keeping international peace. By 1928, some 28 nations had signed its covenant of membership.

However, 11 years later, the nations of the world again embroiled themselves in another major war—WWII from 1939-45. This war eventually took away some 90 million lives.

At the end of WWII, the world abolished the League of Nations and formed the United Nations (UN) in 1946. Through the UN, the nations of the world pledged “to have succeeding generations free from the scourge of war”.

WWII only ended to signal the beginning of hostility between two superpowers—the US and the Soviet Union. This hostility was known as the Cold War. For almost 50 years, the world lived under the real threat of nuclear extinction.

Though the Cold War came to an end, warring nations continued to abound. There were glimpses of peace, but alas, these often vanished almost as quickly as they appeared. Indeed, peace on earth is so much desired yet so elusive throughout the years of human history. Someone once said, “Peace is that glorious moment in history when everyone stops to reload.”

But Jesus said in Matthew 5:9 which is the 7th Beatitude, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”

Is Jesus asking us to do the impossible today—i.e. to chase and capture the elusive ideal or dream of peace in our world?

I believe Jesus is telling us three things as we live as His people here on earth.

The first thing that Jesus Christ is telling us in the 7th Beatitude has to do with ...

I. The condition of the human heart

When Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers,” it must have sounded strange to the ears of His Jewish audience. Remember that the Jews in Jesus’ time were struggling to live under Roman rule. Many of them wanted to see Rome defeated and kicked out of their country. There were Jewish freedom fighters called “Zealots” who believed that the only way there would be peace in Israel was through war with Rome. But Jesus called them to be peacemakers! How irrelevant Jesus could be!

When Jesus speaks of peace, He is having in mind the Hebrew understanding of SHALOM. The Hebrew word SHALOM is understood around the world to mean peace. But peace is only one small part of the meaning of SHALOM.

In Israel today, even though the Jews don’t have much peace in the way we commonly understand (i.e. absence of conflict), they use the word SHALOM on a daily basis. They use it to greet people and to bid farewell to people. However, SHALOM means much more than peace, hello or goodbye.

SHALOM can be understood as a verb and as now:¹

As a verb, it conveys two ideas.

- One, in concrete, everyday use, the verb form of SHALOM means “to pay”. This payment is not a gift or a favour, but is an obligation arising out of an agreement you and I might enter. Such an agreement demands a relationship of trust. When we fulfil those obligations in the spirit of mutual trust, we are doing SHALOM.
- Two, the Bible also uses SHALOM as a legal term—“shall make restitution”. In the Book of Exodus, the section following the 10 Commandments includes lots of concrete applications. Among them are 14 practical rules about losing, stealing, or damaging someone else’s property (e.g. Exod. 21:33-34). Here the issue is not so much relationship but responsibility. Put in another way, if I cause you loss, I’m obliged to make good for what I’ve destroyed or taken. Again, I’m not doing you a favour, or acting out of the goodness of my heart. I’m doing what justice demands. That, too, is doing SHALOM.

¹ <https://www.friendsjournal.org/2003133>

So SHALOM as a verb is talking about holding up my side of an agreement, or making restitution if I have deprived you of something that is rightfully yours, even if I did it unknowingly or by mistake.

As a noun, SHALOM has the basic meaning of “sufficiency”. This sufficiency involves food, shelter, clothing, land, or work. Biblical SHALOM is not sufficiency in the sense of having just enough to get by. It is sufficiency on a grander scale. It is sufficiency in the face of abundance, not sufficiency in the face of scarcity.

We need to acknowledge today that SHALOM as sufficiency on a grand scale is a long way off. Who among us is not aware, as we look around the world, that even in the face of abundance, sufficiency is in short supply? You know that on planet Earth today, 80 percent of the goods and services are consumed by just 20 percent of the people.

God does not create scarcity because He is the all sufficient God. Rather, it is human self-centredness that creates scarcity when those who have are keeping what they have from those who have not. When this happens, there is no SHALOM—no sufficiency, no balance. Those who have just keep on taking; those who have not thus lose even the little they have.

The SHALOM that Jesus speaks about is very much something we do, not something we feel. SHALOM comes from exercising justice towards each other, and for many of us that means going beyond our family and friends to those who do not have sufficiency, whose needs are not met, whose agreements are broken, and whose possessions are taken and not returned. Only when we have tried to right these wrongs can we then say we have SHALOM.

Indeed, true peace is the presence of God’s justice and righteousness. Peace is a positive result of people submitting to the justice and righteousness of God. This kind of peace will not be found without yielding to God’s justice and righteousness. The external conflict in relationships is an indication of the internal conflict in the heart. It points to the problem of sin in the human heart. Until we take care of this sin problem we will never experience true peace.

When Jesus speaks out the 7th Beatitude, He is spelling out the condition of our heart. The reason why peace is so elusive in this world is because we have a heart problem. And we must first admit that and then allow God to deal with it. And that problem is this—the human heart is tainted with sinfulness and selfishness. All the external conflict in the world is merely a reflection of the internal conflict in all of us—in our heart.

A second thing that Jesus Christ is telling us in the 7th Beatitude has to do with ...

II. The calling of God to those who have His peace

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Jesus calls those who have His peace to be “peacemakers”—to make peace. The place to start is perhaps to examine our own lives to be sure that we have experienced peace ourselves.

It is clear from Scripture that an encounter with the living Christ is the pathway to peace. Before we can become peacemakers we must first know peace in Christ ourselves. True peace is found only in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Then we must set about actively making peace. This is what it means to be a peacemaker. To make peace we must do something to bring others into this relationship of peace with Christ. Indeed, peace must be made. Peace never happens by chance. Someone has to drag the parties to the table and give them a reason to stop their fight. Jesus never said, “Blessed are the peace-wishers or the peace-hopers or the peace-dreamers.” But he did say, “Blessed are the peacemakers.”

Who then is a peacemaker? A peacemaker is someone who is actively working to reconcile men to God and to one another. He (or she) is a “minister of reconciliation” who has been given the “message of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

Peacemaking starts in your closest and most intimate relationships—between husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters. Then it moves out to your extended family, your close friends in church, on the job, and in the classroom.

But the great need is to reconcile men and women to God. This is the heart of the gospel. It is the reason Jesus came to earth and it is why the church exists. Other organizations exist to address human problems but the church exists to address the sin problem—the barrier that exists between God and man.

To check if you are a peacemaker or not, test yourself with these questions, “Am I bringing people closer to God or pushing them further away from Him? Am I bringing people closer together or pulling them apart?”

Now, this does not mean that there will be no risk involved in being a peacemaker. Peacemaking can be very challenging indeed. Sometimes people resent your efforts at peacemaking. Often you risk losing your relationship or even reputation with the person(s) you are trying to help. Jesus never said it would be easy. But He said we would be blessed.

I remember one time when some of my Christian colleagues in my working place were plotting the downfall of our boss. They wanted to make him lose his job because they were not happy with his leadership.

I was very saddened to see Christians adopting this attitude at the workplace. But when I tried to advise them not to do it, I was mistaken as someone on the other side—a potential traitor not to be trusted. It was painful as a peacemaker for the Lord.

Later on, I myself was greatly troubled by something that my boss had done. I went into his office and voiced my displeasure. To my surprise, he asked me to close the door and gave me his full attention regarding my unhappiness. After hearing me out, he promised to rectify certain things.

I asked why he would listen to me and not the others since they too had quite valid grievances. His reply was enlightening—“The reason why I am not open to hear them out is because they have always come across as troublemakers, not peacemakers.”

I had felt so difficult and even painful to be a peacemaker. But at that moment when my boss said these words, I felt I had received the blessing Jesus spoke, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” I felt like a blessed person.

The third and last thing that Jesus Christ is telling us in the 7th Beatitude has to do with ...

III. The character of those who make peace here on earth

Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.” And Scripture calls Jesus as the Prince of Peace. In other words, to be a peacemaker is to do the work of Jesus; to reflect a character trait of Jesus Himself. When we are doing the work of peacemaking, we are doing God-like work. We will never be God, but we will reflect God-like character when we do peacemaking.

When someone says to a son, “I can see your father in you,” that person is talking about an inherited image. The same is true for Christians. We inherit the image of our Heavenly Father, and that is reflected in the character trait of a peacemaker.

Being born again, we now take upon us the new nature in Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. By His Spirit, Jesus lives in us and His character is reflected through our lives. We do peacemaking and we become like Christ.

It is because our actions reflect the nature of God that we are called the sons (and daughters) of God. This is our testimony to the world.

As God's people, do we reflect His character in the way we resolve our differences so that the world can take our talk of love and peace seriously?

I once was on a plane sitting beside a pastor, and on our way to a conference in the Philippines. He was actually a lay leader who answered the call to pastor his church after the previous pastor had left. I had known his church to be about 50 people, and struggling with finance and human resources.

I asked him, "How's your church doing now that you are the pastor?"

He replied, "Well, praise the Lord. We now have more than 100 people and there's a new spiritual vibrancy among us."

Curious, I asked him how it all came about. He said, "The previous pastor did not leave in the best of circumstances. We did not like his leadership, and so we initiated to have his time with us terminated. I was a key figure in that. But the Lord convicted us as a church that the way we got him out was not right. There was too much blame-shifting and finger-pointing on our part. We felt that we needed to initiate some measure of peacemaking and reconciliation, or the Lord will not be pleased with us. So, my leaders and I wrote a formal letter of apology to this previous pastor on behalf of the church, admitting the wrong on our part and seeking his forgiveness. It is only when this was done that our people seemed to be rejuvenated with some fresh spiritual fervency and vibrancy in terms of personal walk with God and witnessing for Him."

The people of the world often deal with their differences using verbal and physical violence. As God's people, He expects us to do better. We are His ministers of reconciliation here on earth because we have received reconciliation with Him in Jesus Christ. We are His peacemakers here on earth because we have received His peace in Jesus Christ.

But to be true to this God-like character trait, we must not settle for peace at the expense of holiness and truth. We must be sure that we have done everything we possibly can to handle the situation with love and grace as well as in righteousness and truth. We do what we can to understand the facts, lessen the tension, break down barriers, and help people communicate with each other. We must never walk away with an unforgiving spirit.

Everyone can do something to portray Jesus as the Prince of Peace to heal broken relationships and wounded lives. Only God knows how much He can accomplish through us. All He asks is that we surrender our little contribution to Him and then watch what He can do with it.

Conclusion

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Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”

This beatitude tells us that ...

- The condition of the human heart is tainted with sinfulness and selfishness. Unless and until God deals with it, whatever appearance of peace we have is only shallow and hollow.
- The calling of those who have received God’s peace is to be His peacemakers here on earth. Peace will not come about by chance, only when God’s people intentionally make it happen.
- The character of those who make peace in God’s name is that they will show the world some measure of what God is like. His love and grace will be evident. So too His justice and righteousness.

To submit to the Lordship of Christ today is to decide to be a peacemaker. Three decisions that we all can consider as a peacemaker:

- One, decide to settle the inner tension and struggle within ourselves. Ask God to help us strive for the good and subdue the bad in ourselves.
- Two, decide to take every opportunity to bring God’s peace to others. Build bridges and relationships with others; live the Gospel-directed life so that we can bring them nearer to God.
- Three, decide to take every opportunity to make peace with others. Ask God to help us resolve disputes and erase divisions; reconcile differences and eliminate strife; speak words that build up and not tear down. Colossians 3:15 says, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.” The word “rule” here literally means “to act as an umpire”. Scripture is saying that believers should act in a way that God the Divine Umpire does not have to step in and call them to order.

Pray that the Lord will embolden us to be His peacemakers here in this fallen world because that’s who we are as children of God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”

Amen!