

Text: Matthew 5:9 (Pew Bible, pg.958)

Title: “Pursuing Peace”

INTRODUCTION

Let’s open our Bibles to Matthew 5:1. During these summer months we’ve been looking at those eight powerful, radical statements made by Jesus at the opening of His Sermon on the Mount. In honor of the words of our Savior let’s stand, and once again I want to read these statements together. Read Matthew 5:1-2. Before long school will be starting again; boys and girls may or may not be excited about that. But we never graduate from the school of Jesus. As His followers we must continuously sit at His feet and hear as He teaches us. Read Matthew 5:3-12. Let me lead us in prayer. As you’re seated keep your Bibles open to Matthew 5:9.

Is it just me, or does it seem with each passing year our nation and our world become more and more in conflict. The divide between political parties in our nation is greater than ever. Racial strife at times seems to erupt like we lived in the sixties again. The trial of George Zimmerman in the death of Travon Martin caused many of those ugly feelings to come to the surface once again. Some of the disagreement comes over moral issues that we feel very strongly about ... the sanctity of life and the sanctity of marriage. If there's anything missing from the human experience it is peace. We have to ask ourselves, how would Jesus conduct Himself in this atmosphere of strife and conflict? Families are missing peace, and there’s sometimes even conflict between believers. The world is missing peace, and Jesus calls His followers to help them find it.

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

ILLUSTRATION – In the words of the “Mission Impossible” movies, Jesus would say: “Your mission, Christ-follower, should you choose to accept it, is to go into a world filled with conflict and be peacemakers in My name.” But unlike the instructions of “Mission Impossible,” Jesus doesn’t say: “Should any member of your team be caught or killed, the Secretary will disavow all knowledge of your actions.” No, Jesus says, “Those of you who make the sacrifice to be peacemakers will be blessed to be called sons and daughters of God.” The “Mission Impossible” assignment finished with the words, “This message will self-destruct in five seconds.” No, the message of Jesus is eternal. It doesn’t self-destruct. The mission remains valid up to this very day.

You see our God is a peacemaking God. As you follow His activity in the Bible you see the whole story of redemption that climaxed with death and resurrection of Jesus. And that is God's strategy to bring about peace between rebellious humans and Himself. God is that way and God’s children are to be that way. They have the character of their Father. What He loves (peace), they love. What God pursues (peace), they pursue.

So peacemakers pursue peace. It’s the opposite of a person who deliberately stirs up strife among people. A peacemaker is not a troublesome or quarrelsome person. A peacemaker is one who actively works toward reconciling people with God and with one another.

Now the Bible teaches us that there are three levels of peace:

- **Peace with God** - Throughout the Bible we see God's quest to have peace with us.

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

So the perfect Peacemaker is our Savior Jesus Christ.

- **Peace within ourselves**

Philippians 4:7 - And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

- **Peace with others**

Romans 12:18 - If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

And peacemakers work to help people find peace in each of those realms ... peace with God, peace with self and peace with others. Peacemakers work for harmonious relationships in the church, in families, in the places where we work and where we go to school.

In fact, in ancient times Christ-followers greeted one another with the word "peace." Hebrew speaking folks spoke it *shalom*, which means "God's highest good to you." Greek speaking people greeted one another with the word *eirena* (*i-ranea*). You find at the beginning of most of the letters in the New Testament: "grace and *peace* to you."

Sometimes people ask me if this statement by Jesus means that Christians should always be opposed to war. Not necessarily. You know our Savior Jesus, who is called the Prince of Peace, will one day come to this earth and in justice He will war against those who have rejected Him and who have set up their kingdom on this earth. Human history will end in a great battle, the Battle of Armageddon, and Jesus will be the Mighty Warrior. But until that day His followers are to be peacemakers.

So how do we live as peacemakers? Well Jesus is calling us to a lifestyle where we as Christ-followers work on the real problems that cause wars between nations, crime in communities, conflict in families, and aggression in the human heart. The trouble is in the human heart.

James 4:1 - What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

So there's a spiritual root to the conflicts that exist in nations, in communities, in offices, in schools, in churches and in families. People have sinful desires, and only Jesus Christ can change those sinful desires.

If we are to pursue peace, where we try to bring people into harmony with God and with others, we're going to need some equipment:

1. THE CROSS

Peace with God, others and self is not possible so long as sin abounds. And through the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, God dealt with the sin problem and made peace possible. You see, there's a great canyon between a holy God and sinful human beings. Because of our sin we were separated from God ... we were not at peace with God. And the only way for peace with God to be possible is for Christ to die for our sins. The Cross was laid across that great canyon and then the righteous God could have a relationship with us as sinners. And we as sinners, who were far from God, can now come near by crossing over on the Cross.

Ephesians 2:13 - But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

And something amazing happens. People who were once separated by racial, ethnic and cultural differences now can draw near to each other because of the Cross. Speaking about the barrier between Jews and Gentiles it says...

Ephesians 2:14 - For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,

So Jesus is our Peacemaker. And those of us who follow Him in the Gospel can only be peacemakers because Jesus was the ultimate Peacemaker. But there's another piece of equipment we need:

2. A CALLING

We need to understand that this is our calling as followers of Jesus. Remember that the Beatitudes are not another set of Ten Commandments that have to be obeyed *in order* for us to be right with God. These eight statements of Jesus describe who we are and what we do *because* we are right with God. So people who experience this peace with God, and with self, and with others, are called by God to extend this peace into every relationship and every setting we are part of. And this is what Paul was talking about in...

2 Corinthians 5:18 - All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ (there's the Cross!) and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

This is not optional equipment for believers. God has called us to peace, and He has called us to be peacemakers. And this is the work of evangelism ... helping others make peace with God through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

ILLUSTRATION – The other day I was doing something very intellectually stimulating. I was watching a Super Heroes cartoon with my grandson Cooper. In this particular episode an alien force was able to infiltrate the ranks of the Super Heroes, and to take over some of their bodies. They still looked like Super Heroes, but their minds and their bodies were under the control of an enemy villain. And this made the Super Heroes, who were normally fellow soldiers, now fight with each other. But Iron Man had some special vision equipment where he could see which of his Super Hero partners were actually being held captive by this invisible enemy. And Iron Man could then set them

free. What if we had that ability to see other people for the peril that they are in? They are held in the grip of the enemy, and because of that they are enemies of God ... not at peace with God. Our mission as peacemakers is to help them through the Gospel message to be at peace with God.

So there is a calling. And other piece of equipment that a peacemaker needs is...

3. COURAGE

Sometimes the pathway to peace takes us through great turmoil. Sometimes peacemakers will be persecuted. And that's what Jesus will talk about in the next Beatitude we'll come to next week. There is opposition before there is harmony. There's discord before there is peace. It takes courage to confront unrighteousness which is the enemy of peace. Jesus experienced this Himself, and prepared His disciples for it.

Matthew 10:34 - "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."

Now you may read this and think that Jesus is contradicting Himself here. But He isn't; the sword would not be in His hands, or in the hands of His followers. It would be in the hands of those who try to strike down people who follow Christ. When we stand for righteousness and truth we will experience opposition, even with people in our own families. Our priority in life is to be faithful to God and that will throw us into conflict with others around us who do not share that priority.

That's why the Bible tells us that *so far as it depends on us* we are to be at peace with others. As we take a stand on the truth of God, wherever that may happen, we'll find ourselves disagreeing with others, and others disagreeing with us, but we must always do it with a Christ-like spirit.

So we need courage. But we also need...

4. A HEART

I'm talking about a heart for reconciliation; not just talking about it.

ILLUSTRATION – Have you ever seen a fight break out between teams in a baseball game? You know, it's sort of a tradition that players and coaches rally to support their teammates. So they all pour out on to the field and you can see that there are those who are really mad in the fight, then there are others who are just there, because it's not cool for them to stay in the dugout. I heard about a Christian ballplayer who played for the Seattle Mariners some years ago who explained how he dealt with these bench-clearing brawls. When he saw things heating up he would scan the opponents' bench for a friend, possibly a former teammate. When the fight broke out he would run out on the field like his teammates, but he would race toward his friend on the other team. He quickly grabbed him by the jersey, pretending to start a fight, but then he whispered: "If you don't hurt me, I won't hurt you." Then the two would grab each other, fall to the ground, and do their best to act like they were fighting. So they appeared like they were in the fight and supporting their teammates, but not really fighting. Well something tells me that's not exactly what Jesus had in mind when called us to be peacemakers.

It's not just saying we want peace. It means actively pursuing peace.

So we need a heart for reconciliation. You can never be a peacemaker if your heart is set on revenge and getting even. You can never be a peacemaker if you haven't first experienced the amazing grace of forgiveness from God. If you haven't come to fully experience that forgiveness and grace, you can't be reconciled to others, and you can't help others be reconciled with one another.

Just a few verses on into the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said this:

Matthew 5:23 - "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,

Matthew 5:24 - leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

This means that you don't talk about someone; you go and talk to them. You can't be a peacemaker and be a gossip at the same time. Peacemakers need a heart for reconciliation. And then there's another piece of equipment we need.

5. HUMILITY

Romans 12:18 - If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Humility allows us to not always have the last word. We will hold our tongue. You can never be a peacemaker if you always have to have the last word ... if you think your way is the only way ... if you are only in it to win the argument. Peacemakers have the humility to be willing to yield. There's another piece of equipment we need to be peacemakers.

Ephesians 4:2-3 - Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

There's one last piece of equipment we need:

6. WISDOM

Peacemakers have wisdom from heaven. Fools stir up dissention. The wise pursue that which leads to peace. Listen as I read from James 3. Turn there or follow along on the screen:
Read James 3:14-18.

CONCLUSION

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

When Jesus calls us "sons of God" He's talking about the dignity and character of the relationship. It's the same word used in the title of Jesus ... "Son of God." Children of God have the character of their Father in heaven. You're never more like your heavenly Father than when you're a

peacemaker. And when in the Day of Judgment people who are peacemakers will be recognized not as enemies of God, but as sons and daughters of God, and welcomed into the Father's house.

When Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God," He's not telling us how to become a son of God. But in another place Jesus was very specific about how to become a child of God.

John 1:12 - Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—

You see, we're not all children of God. We're all created by God, but we're not all in God's family. The only way to enter God's family is to receive Christ ... to believe and trust in Him. And when that happens you become a new person ... you are born again. You're at peace with God, and God gives you a heart to be a peace with others.