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Finding Peace and Making Peace in the Capitol (The Sermon on the Mount) Matthew 5:1-12

Conflict. Rivalry. Strife. Discord. Controversy. Debate. These are just a few of the words that at times describe work and relationships in the capitol. In the world around us we see a never-ending series of wars and conflicts between people and nations. On a personal level we often struggle to have peaceful relationships with others. On an international scale we find that despite peace talks, peace summits, peace treaties, and peacekeepers, still there is no real peace. Against this backdrop we see the tremendous relevance of Jesus' seventh beatitude:

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God" (Matthew 5:9)

What is Genuine Peace?

Some see peace as the absence of disagreement, conflict, or war. But peace is much more than the absence of conflict; it is the presence of righteousness which results in right relationships. Peace is not just stopping war; peace is creating righteousness that brings enemies together in love.

In order to be a peacemaker, we must understand the actual nature and source of the conflicts in our own lives, in the lives of those around us, and in our world. It is only then we can discover the answer to solving those conflicts and making peace. Conflicts, whether between individuals or between nations, arise because of the opposition of Satan and the sinfulness of man's heart. The fall of Satan and the fall of man have left us in a world without peace. Mediations, compromises, and peace talks will never bring about genuine lasting peace. According to Scripture, the trouble is the heart of man and nothing but a new heart can possibly deal with the problem.

Before we can have peace with others and be a peacemaker, we must first be at peace with God. The Bible tells us that apart from Christ we were "enemies of God" (Rom. 5:10; Eph. 2:3; Col. 1:2). Christ suffered and died on the cross that our sins might be forgiven and we might be at peace with Him. **"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ..." (Romans 5:1)** The Beatitudes are the characteristics of those who in repentance have placed their faith in Christ and are part of God's kingdom. Those who are His children will have peace in their own hearts and lives and will actively seek to make peace with and among others.

The Scriptures tell us of the peace we can have in our own hearts and lives, even in the midst of the stress, trials, and difficulties of life. **"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."** (Philippians 4:6-7). When we are at peace with God, we find genuine peace in our own hearts. It is this peace we want to share with others and in doing so, we may become peacemakers.

What Does it Mean to Be a Peacemaker?

First, we must recognize that the focus of Jesus' message is on the personal aspects of making peace with God and with others. When we consider the war against terror, civil wars, military budgets, and political and religious oppression around the world, doesn't our personal relationship with God and others pale in comparison? The answer is a resounding **NO**. In the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is dealing with the vital truth that apart from a changed heart and a changed life, no one can be called a child of God.

A peacemaker is one about whom we can say two things. **Passively**, a peacemaker is peaceable. A quarrelsome person could never be a peacemaker. A proud person will have difficulty having or making peaceful relationships with others. Again, it is clear how the Beatitudes build upon one another. One who is poor in spirit, mourns over sin, is meek, hungers for righteousness, is merciful and pure in heart, is one who will be at peace in their own heart and will seek to make peace with others. **Actively**, a peacemaker seeks to make peace with and among others. He

desires peace and does everything he can to encourage peace and maintain it. A peacemaker is one who not only does not make trouble but goes out of his way to produce peace.

It is important to note that just as meekness does not mean weakness, being a peacemaker does not mean we will never disagree, or never stand up for what is right. Paul constantly encouraged believers to be peacemakers, yet he caused a riot almost everywhere he went through sharing the gospel message. Peacemaking requires courage and perhaps even confrontation. It takes great courage to go to one we have wronged or offended in order to make peace. It may take confrontation to point out to others their offences in order to help them make peace with God and with others.

Being a peacemaker ultimately means sharing the good news of the gospel in order to make peace between others and God. Paul writes of this responsibility in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20:

Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

We are reconciled (at peace) with God, and so we are ambassadors actively seeking, even begging others to make peace with God.

In our introductory study we discussed how the Beatitudes are an introduction to the rest of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes lay out the heart attitudes and character of those who are followers of Christ. The rest of the sermon shows how those attitudes might be expressed in various areas of daily life. Jesus goes on to describe further what it means to be a peacemaker later in the sermon. In Matthew 5:43-45 Jesus teaches:

"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 causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Notice verse 45, "**...so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.**" This is the same thought as that found in Matthew 5:9. He gives two concrete examples of acts of love that seek to bring peace and overcome the enmity between us and other people. In

verse 44 He says to "**love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...**" In Matthew 5:47 He gives another example of peacemaking love: "**If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others?"** He relates making peace to something as simple and practical as praying for an enemy and honestly, genuinely greeting an opponent. We will not feed animosity by ignoring or avoiding people. We might try to make peace by offering the only courtesy an enemy will tolerate, a greeting. The peacemaker looks an enemy right in the eye and says, "good morning". This is done with a longing for peace in the heart, not with merely phony politeness to hide our anger.

We must realize peacemaking may not necessarily mean peace achieving. Paul exhorted us in Romans 12:18 "**If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men**". He reminds us we are to "**pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another**". (Romans 14:19) In Ephesians 4:3 He implores us to walk worthy of our calling as believers by "**being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**". However, despite our best sincere efforts, we may not be able to make peace with those who are opposed to the gospel. Still, God desires for us to be faithful in seeking to make peace, regardless of the results.

What is the Blessing of Being a Peacemaker?

Jesus says those who are peacemakers will be recognized as the children of God. The word used here speaks of the dignity, honor, and standing of our position as God's children. Indeed, one is truly blessed or fortunate to know we can have such a relationship with Him. We do not become children of God by striving to be peacemakers; we are peacemakers because we are children of God and are simply demonstrating our relationship with Him by seeking to make peace with others.

Have you found peace with God through faith in Christ?

Are you seeking to help others make peace with God by sharing the good news of the gospel?

Are you helping to make peace with and between others – even here in the capitol?

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDIES

Thursdays

8:00 AM Government Org. Conference Room (East Wing)

12:00 PM Senate President's Conference Room