

Ministers of Reconciliation

by Dick Woodward

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being a minister of reconciliation, sharing the message of reconciliation, and experiencing the miracle of reconciliation.

Duration: 21:38

Scripture: Isaiah 53:5, Matthew 5:3-9, 2 Corinthians 5:19

Topics: "Reconciliation"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the Sermon on the Mount and the attitudes that Jesus teaches his followers. The sermon begins by explaining that the multitudes represent the people with all their problems, while Jesus and his disciples represent the solution to these problems. The speaker highlights four 'coming attitudes' that involve aligning oneself with Jesus and having the right attitude towards him and oneself. Then, the sermon transitions to the 'going attitudes,' which involve showing mercy and unconditional love to others. The speaker emphasizes that being a channel of God's love means directing that love towards the hurting and lost world. The sermon concludes by reminding the audience that God has called his disciples to be ministers of reconciliation, just as Jesus was, and to embody the attitudes taught in the Sermon on the Mount.

Transcript

Welcome to another lesson of the Mini Bible College and this series of messages on the Sermon on the Mount. The Bible says that God was in Jesus Christ, reconciling the world back to Himself, no longer keeping a record of their sins. That is indeed good news.

God has called the disciples of Jesus Christ to be ministers of reconciliation too. But what does that mean? Well listen carefully, because our teacher will explain that in today's lesson. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.

These are seven of the eight Beatitudes of Jesus, with which He began His teaching on the mountaintop. That teaching we call the Sermon on the Mount. We have seen that this was a retreat where He was recruiting disciples who would be a part of His solution, part of His answer to the problems in the multitudes of people around the Sea of Galilee.

He has been ministering to them, perhaps thousands of them, and withdraws from the crowd and organizes this little retreat further up the mountainside with His disciples. He invites personally people to join Him at this retreat, and the essence of the teaching given in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, as we have seen, is to show these disciples He has invited to this retreat how they can be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, His solution, and His answer to the problems represented by those multitudes of people who have every problem imaginable. The multitudes represent the people with all its problems, and the people with Jesus at this first Christian retreat represent His solution, His answer to the problems of this world.

We have made several observations about the beautiful attitudes with which He begins this teaching. We have said that four of them are coming attitudes and four of them are going attitudes. Between the fourth and the fifth Beatitudes, there is a kind of spiritual division that separates the coming attitudes from the going attitudes.

The first four have to do with coming to Him and being aligned with Him, getting the right attitude toward Him and the right attitude toward ourselves. These are the coming attitudes. Then, beginning with blessed are the merciful, which means those who are filled with the unconditional love of God for this hurting and lost world, you have the last four attitudes, which we have called the going attitudes.

If you are going to be merciful, a channel of God's unconditional love, toward whom is that love going to be directed? You see, that takes you off the mountaintop, back into the multitude. As you love, you love with a pure heart. Now we shall see, as we look at the seventh attitude in this study, that this is also an attitude that has to be expressed in the stream of humanity right in the middle of the people and the problems.

The one we will focus on in this study is blessed are the peacemakers. We have also made the observation that these beatitudes come in pairs. They can be seen in couplets.

Blessed are the poor in spirit who grieve or mourn over the fact that they are poor in spirit. Those two go together. Blessed are the meek, those who come and take the yoke of Christ, and then once they accept the bit, once they accept the yoke of Christ upon their life, they hunger and thirst for what is right, as the apostle Paul did.

They hunger and thirst to know what it is the Lord would have them to do, and He, God, fills them with it. Then they became merciful, channels of His unconditional love, and while they express this unconditional love of God toward the hurting and the lost people of this world, they do so with a pure heart, a heart that has been catheterized of all sin and selfishness and ulterior motives. This is coupled with blessed are the merciful.

The promise is that these people who love with a pure heart see God, which means they see God work because God works through them. He expresses His love through them. The seventh attitude is blessed are the peacemakers.

This word really is blessed are the reconcilers. Blessed are those who are the agents of God's reconciliation. Reconciliation is one of the great gospel words.

We find it later in the epistles of Paul. I believe one of the finest statements of the gospel of Christ and what it means to be a minister of that gospel is found in 2 Corinthians chapter 5. In this magnificent passage beginning about verse 12 or 13, we have one of the greatest statements that the apostle Paul makes about the gospel and the ministry of that gospel. He is responding, frankly, to the accusation that he is crazy, that he is insane.

What they say is that he is beside himself and he is defending himself against that charge. They accused Paul and Jesus of being beside themselves. The Greek word is actually eccentric.

What they really accused Paul of, they also accused Jesus of. They said of Jesus, he is beside himself. They accused Paul of being eccentric.

And what they mean by that is everybody has a center around which your life revolves. What they're saying about Paul and what they said about Jesus was this. You have another center, Paul.

They said of the Lord, you have another center around which your life revolves. It's not the same center around which our lives revolve. So you're eccentric.

Your life has a different center than our lives have. As Paul defends himself against this accusation in 2 Corinthians 5, he says in so many words, there's enough evidence to convict me. You are right.

I'm eccentric by your standards. I do have another center around which my life revolves. For many years, my life revolved around self.

Even if it was self-righteousness with which I concerned myself, my life revolved around the center of self. But when I met Jesus Christ on the road of Damascus, my life found a new center. The center around which my life revolves now is Christ.

He speaks of his life in terms of his relationship to Christ. He uses expressions like by Christ, in Christ, for Christ, through Christ. His whole life is centered around Christ now.

And he says that he's making this defense not because he has a need to defend himself, but that those who take pride in what is seen rather than what is in the heart might be answered. As he gives his defense of his sanity, he says, For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God. Or if we are of sound mind, it is for you.

For the love of Christ constrains us because we judge thus, that if one died for all, then all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh.

Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. All things have passed away.

Behold, all things have become new. Notice the use of the word reconciliation from this point on. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ as though God were pleading through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

For he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him. We then as workers together with him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.

Behold, now is the acceptable time. Behold, now is the day of salvation. You can put this magnificent passage of Paul in 2 Corinthians 5 together with the seventh beatitude, because when Jesus said, Blessed are the peacemakers, what he really said was, Blessed are the reconcilers.

Blessed are the ministers of reconciliation. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5 that when Jesus Christ died on the cross, God was in Christ at that very moment, reconciling the world unto himself, no longer charging their trespasses against them, because he charged them all against Christ. In Isaiah 53, verse 5, he says, The chastisement for our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed.

By that, Isaiah meant that all the chastisement we deserve because of our sin was laid upon him. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Paul is saying the same thing, but he is putting it this way.

When Christ died on that cross, he made it possible for God to be reconciled to this world and for God to reconcile the world to himself. The biggest problem that the Bible addresses is this problem. There is a divorce between God and man.

God and man have become alienated through sin. That is the story of Genesis chapter 3. That's the bad news. But the good news, the gospel, is that God has become reconciled to man, and he has made it possible for every man and woman and young person in this whole world to be reconciled to him.

He made that possible when Christ died on the cross. From the time of Christ's death on the cross, God has not been charging the sins of sinners against them any longer. He has become reconciled to them, and he has made it possible for them to be reconciled to him.

That's the miracle that happened to Paul on the road to Damascus. He was really alienated from God until then. Paul was not one with God when he was trying to have the first generation of the church put to death.

But when he met Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, he became reconciled to God. He experienced the miracle of reconciliation. But at the same time, he not only experienced a miracle, he also had a commission that was given to him.

That commission was the ministry of reconciliation. He also had a message given to him. That message was the message of reconciliation.

From the time this happened to Paul on the road to Damascus, from the time he experienced the miracle of reconciliation and received this message and ministry of reconciliation, he went out into this world preaching, telling us to be reconciled to God. Do not receive the grace of God in vain. Be reconciled to God.

Trust the good news that he is reconciled to you and has made it possible for you to be reconciled to him. Simply be reconciled to him. That was his gospel.

That was his message. That was his ministry. And that was the miracle he himself experienced.

Now that is what Jesus is talking about in verse 9 of Matthew 5 when he gives the seventh beatitude. Blessed are the peacemakers. Again he is saying, look down the mountainside.

You see down there at the bottom of the mountain all those people with all of those problems? Here is another reason for the problems they have. They are alienated. They are alienated from God.

They are not really reconciled to God. There is a divorce between them and God. They have never heard the good news that God has reconciled that divorce if they only will believe it.

And what they need to hear is the message of reconciliation. Of course at that point it was a message that God was going to do this when Jesus Christ died on the cross. We are on this side of the cross.

So the good news is that God has already reconciled the world to himself including you. Have you ever personally trusted the good news and made your peace with God? Have you ever experienced your own personal reconciliation with him? Blessed are the peacemakers. It really means blessed are the ministers of reconciliation.

I wonder if you realize that the gospel of Jesus Christ is not bad news. It is good news. The way some people share the gospel you would think it was bad news.

Some people practically say, have you heard the bad news? You're going to hell and you're going to burn and burn forever. That's not good news at all, is it? That's bad news. But the gospel is good news.

The gospel is the message of reconciliation, the miracle of reconciliation, the ministry of reconciliation. It is the good news that you don't have to go to hell because Jesus Christ went to hell and back for you. All your sins were charged against him and so they don't have to be charged against you.

You don't have to go to hell because you can be reconciled to God right now. God is already reconciled to you. He's been reconciled to you for over 2,000 years.

Will you just simply believe it and be reconciled to him? See, that's the good news. A man I was once speaking with told me a story about a chaplain in the military. A chaplain is a man who travels with the military and when soldiers wish to learn about spiritual things or soldiers are already Christians, need encouragement and prayer, they often will meet with the chaplain.

His story went something like this. In one battle during the war, there was a man who had been wounded. The battle was very fierce and men were dying all around him.

Still under fire, the man observed way off in the distance the military chaplain crawling from one wounded man to another. This chaplain would crawl up as close as he could to the ear of a soldier because of the noise and tell him something. Then he would crawl to the next wounded soldier and do the same thing.

This particular wounded soldier found himself hoping that this chaplain would soon get to him because he wanted to hear what the chaplain was saying. But this chaplain was also wounded by a bullet himself. In spite of it all, he continued to crawl from one wounded man to the next telling them something.

When he was about 30 men away from this particular soldier, another bullet hit the chaplain and killed him. And so this man never did get to find out what the chaplain was telling those men. Well, the man who was telling this story to me then asked, You're a minister.

If you were the chaplain, what would you be telling those men who were dying of their wounds? That is a wonderful opening for a minister of reconciliation. I was able to share with that man these verses in 2 Corinthians 5 about the miracle of reconciliation and the message of reconciliation. That is what I believe the chaplain was telling those men.

That is what I believe Jesus means when he says, Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God. The real sons of God are the ministers of reconciliation. A theologian said this once, so I'll say it twice.

It is the will of the reconciler that the reconciled should be the agents of reconciliation in the lives of those who are not yet reconciled. Let me repeat that. It is the will of the reconciler that the reconciled should be the agents of reconciliation in the lives of those who are not yet reconciled.

This is what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, and this is what Jesus is saying in the Seventh Beatitude. He is recruiting reconcilers. He is recruiting ministers of reconciliation on that mountaintop.

When he says, Blessed are the peacemakers, that is what he means. Chuck Colson wrote a book called Loving God. In that book, in chapter after chapter, he shows examples of what he really believes it means to love God.

One chapter has to do with a Jewish medical doctor in Russia who did something wrong politically and was put into a prison in Siberia. While he was there, his Jewish faith did not seem to help him much. His religion wasn't helping him.

As a medical doctor, he was being forced to do things in the prison that would go against the conscience of any doctor. And he did it simply to survive and to make his life easier. But he hated himself for it.

So it resulted in him beginning to have an intense hatred toward the people who were actually making him do this in that prison. One night he heard a believer in the bunk bed above him praying the disciples' prayer. And when the believer got to that part, forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us, well, he had never heard anything like that before, which caused him to want to talk to the believer all the more.

And then right there in that prison, in the middle of the night, the believer in the top bunk led this man to Christ. He led him to experience the miracle of reconciliation. The next day the doctor operated on somebody, and when that man was coming out of anesthetic that evening, he shared with that man the message of reconciliation.

And that man also experienced the miracle of reconciliation, salvation in Jesus Christ. The doctor was also forced to sign permission slips to put people into punishment cells he knew they would never survive. But he signed the forms saying they would.

Because the doctor had this experience, the miracle of reconciliation, he could no longer do that anymore, so when he was told to sign those papers, he refused. That night, while the doctor lay asleep in his cot, they beat him to death. They plunged his head in with the kind of trials they used to lay bricks.

The man that he had operated on that day had actually been operated on for stomach cancer, and it was not likely he would survive. But he did survive. And that man wrote books and has told the whole world about the many things that happened in that prison.

His name was Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the famous Russian author. And that was how he experienced the miracle of reconciliation, the miracle of new birth. Because a reconciled person became a minister of reconciliation to him.

That is what the theologian meant when he said it is the will of the reconciler that the reconciled should be agents of reconciliation in the lives of those not yet reconciled. In that prison camp, who else was going to be the minister of reconciliation to Alexander Solzhenitsyn but someone like the surgeon who had been reconciled to God the night before? See, that's what Jesus means when he says, Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are the agents of reconciliation in the lives of those who have not yet been reconciled.

We said these beatitudes come in couplets, and they do. This one is coupled with the next beatitude, the eighth one. Blessed are the persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

And that is why the seventh beatitude is, Blessed are the agents of reconciliation. And the eighth beatitude is, Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Notice it is not simply blessed are the persecuted, those persecuted for any reason, especially because of the things they bring upon themselves.

But it's blessed are the persecuted because of righteousness. Persecuted because of sharing the gospel. They identify themselves with Jesus, Christ is their center.

You can see why these two beatitudes go together. Ministers of reconciliation get persecuted because ministers of reconciliation go where the alienation is. They go where the conflict is.

They go where the unreconciled people are, the people who are fighting each other. Think of the areas where there are wars, civil wars and severe conflict. Ministers of reconciliation go there, and that's a great place of danger.

And that is why these last two beatitudes go together. Blessed are the persecuted for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Until next time, God bless you. May God give you peace and joy as you courageously follow our Lord Jesus Christ. And may His eternal blessings be upon you and your family today, and this week, as you seek to know Him better and make Him known to others.

Now, until we meet next time, I want to challenge you to invite someone, perhaps a neighbor or friend, to join us as we continue to study the teachings of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

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