

Sermon on the Mount: Peacemakers & Their Blessedness

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of character and heart purity in being a true peacemaker, and the reward of being called a child of God.

Duration: 44:03

Scripture: Malachi 3:1, Matthew 3:17, Matthew 5:3-9, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 17:5, Romans 8:16

Topics: "Sermon on the Mount"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being a peacemaker in the biblical sense. He explains that becoming a peacemaker is dependent on one's character, which is developed through the process of being poor in spirit, mourning for one's sin, being meek, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, showing mercy to others, and having purity of heart. The speaker highlights that the role of a peacemaker is to bring about peace and transform the hearts of individuals, replacing dis-peace, war, misery, and hatred with worship, grace, and peace. He encourages listeners to reflect on whether they are peacemakers and to share the peace of God with others.

Transcript

I associate myself with Mr. Lowes. Welcome to you all this morning. It's a holiday weekend and we thought that the Wood family would be predominating this morning.

I mean the pews empty, Wood. However, we rejoice to have so many of you along and quite a number of visiting friends among us. Please feel welcome.

It's a great privilege and a great joy for us to welcome the Lord's people wherever you may come from. We want you to feel today that here at Knox we are delighted to have you. May the Lord bless you as you go back to your own congregations for whatever awaits you there during this coming fall.

I would explain for the benefit of those of you who are visiting us that earlier on in the early summer we began a series on the Sermon on the Mount and due to vacation and one thing and another we've not got very far. But this morning we come to the ninth verse in chapter five of Matthew's Gospel to the attitude of our Lord that has to do with the peacemakers. Let me read verse nine to you in chapter five.

Blessed, says our Lord, are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God. Many a time we have pointed out the contrast in the way our Lord comes, as it were, dancing onto the scene here announcing blessed, blessed, blessed. Especially in the light of the fact that the closing words of the Old Testament announce judgment.

God in his infinite mercy has come into time and he has brought within the reach of men and women what God calls blessedness. And what God calls blessedness is worthy of the name. It is not a bubble that will soon vanish.

It is rather something substantive and eternal and worth having at any cost, at any price. Now our Lord has had quite a lot of things to say about the way of blessedness. And there is a progression of thought.

He is leading us, as it were, from one step to another beginning with poverty of spirit. And then he tells us that in order to come to this experience of developing and eternal blessedness we shall have to mourn for our sins and be made meek. And then to hunger and thirst after righteousness and to learn to be merciful and to discover purity of heart.

And then he comes to this. Blessed are the peacemakers. This is the way of blessedness.

If you are walking this way, sooner or later you have to manifest that you are a peacemaker in the biblical sense. So the Beatitudes take another turn at this point. We have seen that in the first three, the eye of the soul gazes inward, as it were.

A person has become strangely conscious of his own condition. That's why he mourns for sin. That's why he grieves and becomes meek in the process.

Then, just after that, there comes a slightly different turn already. It is this. Blessed, says Jesus, is the one who hungers and thirsts after righteousness.

You notice what's happened. He has seen something outside of himself. A righteousness that God requires and that God provides.

And he begins now to hunger for what God gives by grace. But the end is not yet. Hungering and thirsting after righteousness, he must learn to be merciful.

And learning to be merciful, he must be pure in heart. And learning to be pure in heart, he must express it in this matter of peacemaking. Peacemaking.

Blessed are the peacemakers. You will notice that in the first part, therefore, of the Beatitudes, the first section, the emphasis has been upon character. Upon character.

And we do note, we do well to note, the basic approach of Christianity and the basic approach of our Lord to life. It's very evident here in these Beatitudes. It's evident in many other places too.

The most important thing is character. Jesus would have us become a certain kind of people in order that we may be capable of living a certain kind of life. We can only do what God requires us to do when we have become what God requires us to be.

In this 20th century, we in North America are terribly taken up with the matter of doing. Now doing is important. But from the biblical perspective, we must first of all learn to be what God requires of us.

And that's the emphasis here in the Sermon on the Mount. We shall have a whole concourse of ethical injunctions brought before us one after another, but they are built upon the kind of character that our Lord delineates first of all in these Beatitudes. Now don't let me go ahead of myself.

I'm just wanting to say now that you do not become a peacemaker in the biblical sense and in the Christian sense before you have become poor in spirit and mourn for your sin and been made meek and begun to hunger and thirst after righteousness and know something of being merciful to others and purity of heart emerging. In other words, becoming peacemakers is dependent again you see upon character. That's a matter of principle.

Having said that, let's come to the very challenging word before us this morning. I don't think we can say anything about this text other than that it is terribly challenging. The first thing I would like you to notice is the passion that should predominate in the lives of God's people.

A passion for peace. Blessed, says Jesus Christ, are the peacemakers. And note carefully that the word that is used is peacemakers, not peace talkers or peace dreamers or simply peace planners or peace lovers.

You can think about peace and that's good. You can read about peace and that's good. You can plan for peace and that's necessary.

But the emphasis here in our text this morning is beyond all that, peacemakers. People who are involved in the act, in the art of making peace. And our Lord, quite evidently from the Sermon on the Mount, expects every Christian to be involved in this.

This is nothing strange. If you're acquainted with the New Testament, this shouldn't strike you as something odd this morning. It's part and parcel of the makeup of a Christian.

This comes naturally, says our Lord. This is the way of blessedness. This is the way to glory.

You're a peacemaker. You'll never get to glory unless you're a peacemaker. Our question very naturally comes up, of course, in a very crucial question.

Who is our Lord referring to? I may have answered it in part, but I must face it squarely, lest there should be any difficulty here. Who is our Lord referring to? Is he talking, for example, about folk who take a pacifist line in life and do not believe in any kind of involvement in military affairs? Was Jesus referring to them? Is he referring to and is he saying they are blessed who lead the band the bomb marches or band the cruise marches? Do they come within the category that our Lord had in mind here? Is he referring to them? Who really did our Lord have in mind here? Can we say? Can we be sure? And now let me say one thing about the leaders who ban the bomb or ban the cruise or ban anything else that is hostile and warring. For my part, I have learned to salute anybody that tries to diffuse conflagration and tries to build a bridge between warring parties in society, whether they be black and white, rich and poor, employers, employees, whatever.

We have far too many people who go out into each new day and the only thing they do is to tear up society. They tear up their own homes. They tear up the office affairs where they are.

They tear up friendships. They're just tearing up and tearing down. And I think we owe a little respect to anybody, anywhere, who at any level whatsoever is a peacemaker.

Even in the church of Jesus Christ, we have many trigger-happy people. Wherever they are, they have jagged edges. They step on everybody's toe and they've got to have their own way and if they don't have their own way, you're in for it.

Not necessarily the minister, but somebody is. They plow through and they turn the turf upside down and they break everything like a plow breaks the sod. That's not grace.

Now having said that, and I have to say that, having said that, however, I believe that our Lord Jesus is referring to a quality of peacemaking that no man or woman is capable of indulging in who is not a Christian. Our Lord is here referring of a quality of peace which is so deep and so extensive, indeed it is eternal in its significance and however much we may know of it here, it is but a foreglim of the peace of the city of peace of heaven. And the only people who can really be involved in bringing about that kind of peace are those who have already passed through the experiences involved and implicit in the preceding beatitudes.

In other words, the only person who can be a peacemaker in the sense in which Jesus used the word is somebody who himself, I repeat, and I repeat not because I've got nothing else to say but because I think it's important. The only people who can be involved in this kind of peacemaking are those who have been humbled before God, who know before God that they're poor in spirit, they're bankrupt. And because morally and spiritually they know they're lost, they mourn for their sin.

And they so mourn that they become meek. They're not arrogant as they were. They've lost the punch of arrogance and something new has come in and they're meek, they're tender, they're compassionate, they're merciful to others.

And they yearn for righteousness, to be right with God and to do what is right in the sight of God to everybody, to everybody, everywhere. They're concerned that the right should be done for the glory of God. And they're showing some measure of heart purity.

And you see, really, you and I cannot be involved in peacemaking without some measure of heart purity. Our motives, for example, must be pure. Our thoughts must be pure.

You cannot bring warring factions together and be honest with both parties and speak the truth in love. You cannot do it unless your heart is pure. If you're a hypocrite, if you have an evil intention, if you have a false motive, then you simply cannot be a peacemaker in this sense.

Blessed are the peacemakers. How few there are. The Jews of our Lord's day had been looking for a warrior Messiah.

They were given the shock that caused them disaster nationally, whereas it might have meant their elevating eternally. And the shock was this, that the Messiah whom they had expected to be a warrior came bringing peace. Peace on earth, sang the angels.

Peace on earth. The prophet looking forward to the day and the apostle Paul looking back to the day sang how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news and proclaim peace. Jesus was introduced as the Prince of Peace.

Now, but we've got to bring in a word here which may seem very contradictory. Contradictory, may seem contradictory. And I have to say it because I'm sure you'll read your New Testaments and you will come

across it and you will wonder now, a man in Knox this morning was not really being honest with the Scriptures.

Well, all right. It's necessary to see things here that must be held in tension. He came to bring peace.

He came to die to make peace. Colossians chapter 1 has this amazing phrase, to make peace by the blood of his cross. And Paul says in Ephesians that he came to preach peace to them that are far off the Gentile nations, pagan, without any knowledge of God said that you have from nature and their own consciences, depraved as they were.

And to those that were near the Jews who've been taught and educated in the Word of God. He came to preach peace. Ah, but wait a moment.

Jesus also said this. Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace but a sword for I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemy will be the members of his very own household.

What does this mean? This is contradictory of what we're saying. It isn't really. Jesus explains if you follow the context in Matthew 10.

He explains and it's already involved in what we've said. He is the bringer of peace between man and God and man and man. But in the proclamation of peace to warring men whose hearts are depraved, you get into trouble.

When you preach peace to depraved men and women, you'll be snubbed. When you bring the truth to men who love lies and love darkness, you will not be welcomed. On the contrary, what will happen is this.

They will ask you, who on earth are you? Who are you to tell us these things? Who are you to tell us what's right? Who are you to tell us what's wrong? Who are you to tell us the way of peace? And so there will be a division starting in the home between a mother and a daughter, maybe a father and a son, maybe a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law. And so there will be division. In peacemaking, there is warfare.

But the peacemaker doesn't make the war. He's not responsible for it. It is despite his godly character.

It is despite the fact that he mourns for his own sin and loves righteousness and is pure in heart. Despite that, the worker will meet in his own labors what Jesus met in his. Some kind of crucifixion or other.

You will remember that our next study has to do with these words of Jesus. Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. What? Against peacemakers? Yeah.

You see, we live in a fallen world. Many people think that the doctrine of sin is something that theologians believe about or some theologians believe in. And it's not all that important.

I tell you, there's no understanding of the world apart from the Bible. We live in a fallen world. The devil's running wild apart from the grace and sovereign power of God.

And even when you bring the message of peace to men who are languishing for it, you'll be snubbed and you'll be hated and in some sense you'll receive what your Lord did. Nevertheless, this is our calling. And Jesus says, blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons, the children of God.

In the light of the nature of this peace then and of the context in which we find this beatitude, we are now quite clear about the answer to the question who are the peacemakers? They are those who have walked thus far into the experience of blessedness that Jesus was speaking about. And it's increasing. It's increasing as the days go by, as obedience follows obedience.

I read a few, must be a year or two ago now, a friend of mine came back to me this week. I read of an ex-soldier, a Britisher, describing a revisit he made to a certain German village two years after the end of World War II. On a Sunday morning, he and his friend came into this village in a car.

And as they came down the main street, the village was really just one main street, one main thoroughfare. He heard the bells of the church calling people to worship. Church on a high tower and beautiful bells.

And there they were calling people to worship God. And it was such a contrast to him because the last time he went into that village, there in the tower of the church some Nazi soldiers were hiding, waiting for the British to come. And they mowed down a whole company of his friends.

And he said he couldn't get over it. Last time the message from the church tower was death. This time they were called to worship God.

I thought that was a parable. This is the task of the peacemaker. It's to bring out of the citadel of man's soul those things that make for dispeace and war and misery and hatred.

It's to transform the heart of man and to install in that same heart the spirit of worship and the spirit of grace and the spirit of peace. Do you know anything about this, my friend? Are you a peacemaker because God has made you into a new creature? You have walked the way of the Beatitudes. You have begun to drink of this divine blessedness.

And as you have, you want to share the peace of God that you have with those who as yet have it not. The passion that should predominate, the prize that crowns. Let's next look at this albeit briefly.

What, according to Jesus, what is it that awaits those who are involved in this matter of peacemaking? Well, Jesus says they're blessed because they will be called sons of God, literally sons of God. That's a generic term, of course, and refers to children of God. It's not cutting out the women folk at all.

It includes both genders here. They are the children of God. Now there are two legitimate ways in which the significance of this phrase sons of God or children of God may be interpreted.

On the one hand, it was a very natural and common idiom of Hebrew speech to speak of sons of God. And you would come across it. They would use the word son or daughter, but I'm talking of sons now.

They would use the word son and they would bring another noun after it to qualify it so that in the New Testament you have reference to sons of thunder. See, the word son or sons and then a qualifying noun after it, sons of thunder. What do they mean by that? Well, they mean aggressive people.

The title was referred to two of the disciples who were very immature at that point and they wanted to bring down the judgment of God upon anybody and everybody almost. That may be an exaggeration, but allow me that. They wanted to bring down the judgment of God and they were called sons of thunder.

They're out for thunder, all right. And they were called sons of thunder. Then you have the phrase sons of Belial, literally meaning worthless people, people without substance.

Belial means empty. Bel is that which is void. Empty people.

There's nothing to them. They're just bubbles. Worthless people.

To the Hebrew mind, therefore, this phrase sons of God or children of God might simply mean godlike people. They will be called godlike people. When people see you about your peacemaking mission, people will say of you, you're godlike.

To the Greek mind, however, the phrase went further than that. It amounted to saying that in the context of this beatitude, peacemakers are blessed in that they are recognized as children of God. Peacemakers will be called not just godlike.

That's very precious. If people say you're godlike, blessed be the name of the Lord. But the phrase probably goes beyond that, meaning that you are indeed the child of God.

And this is what Jesus, I believe, had in mind. Blessed are the peacemakers. They will be called children of God.

Now you have a problem. Who's going to call them children of God? Now you might be tempted to say almost instinctively off the cuff, well, everybody. Oh, no, no, no.

May I remind you of the next verse? Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you, et cetera, et cetera. Being reviled and persecuted by people in the act of peacemaking, not called sons of God. Who's going to call the peacemaker a child of God? Only two people, I think.

If you have been a rebel against God and against society and someone comes with a message of the grace of God as to how to change your heart and transform your being and give you a new birth and a new start and a new nature that puts you right with God and enables you to live at peace with your neighbors, when once you come to, you will recognize that the person who brings that good news is a child of God. I have found this to be true in my over 30 years in the ministry now that people who are converted through someone will find it very difficult to criticize the person who was used in their conversion. They are predisposed to think highly of him or her.

And you will recognize in the bringer of peace the pedigree of a child of God because you see, this is God's great work. What is God doing in the world? Brothers and sisters, God put everything into the enterprise of bringing peace to men and women without peace. And he's put all his vast resources into this very task.

He sent the only begotten son of his bosom. What for? Just to live among us as an image of the kind of person we all ought to be? Well, that was involved. But the purpose of God went well beyond that.

He came, he sent his son to make peace. Man is at war with heaven. Heaven is anathema to fallen mankind and the ways of God are anathema.

We hate God in his holiness and in his justice. We only have any respect for a God who is made after our own image. Don't you hear people saying, Oh, I don't believe that about God.

This is my God. This is my view of God. We make God after our own image, you see, and that's the only God we really respect.

But the God who was before us and will be after us and is eternal and is just and holy and righteous and true, we don't like him by nature. We're at loggerheads with him. We are going our way rather than going his way.

Now, we need peace with God. And God sent his son and sent his spirit in order having made peace by the blood of his cross, by the spirit to bring that peace into our hearts and shed it abroad. This is God's business.

And if you want to speak generally, this is what God is doing in the world today. This is what evangelism is. A poor line phrase for evangelism is the ministry of reconciliation.

It's to declare peace with God through the blood of Christ and it's to invite rebels to come and lay down their arms and have mercy and have pardon. You see, it's a ministry of reconciliation so that peacemaking in the full-blooded Christian sense is nothing short of active, positive evangelism. Are you involved in it? And when you, knowing the truth of the Bible, knowing enough about the New Testament, see men and women involved in this ministry, you will say, that's a child of God, that.

He's giving his life away to make peace between God and men, between man and man, between members of different families and whatnot. He's a bringer of peace. He's in his father's business.

He's involved in the business of the Father in heaven and because of that we recognize him as belonging to the Father. His pedigree is proved by his activity. But I think that Jesus had something else in mind.

Not only will they recognize the peacemaker as a child of God who have benefited from the peace he proclaims and brings, but I believe that Jesus meant this, blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called, they will be called sons of God by God himself, by God himself. I mean this. I believe that Jesus had something like this in mind.

When he sees his children about his own business, knowing that they will be buffeted and persecuted for righteousness sake and for his sake, knowing what awaits them, yet they go into the distant places of the world and near bringing the peace of God, trying to bring estranged parties together. I believe that there comes a point in the experience of every peacemaker when God, as it were, metaphorically puts his arm around that person and says, my child, do you know that experience? Haven't you seen it in a family? A kiddie has done something that pleases the father, a little kiddie, of course. I don't want to embarrass any growing up lad or lass here, but a little kiddie.

He or she has been very obedient and mummy or daddy pulls the little one, plucks the little one up in his arms and says, my child, my baby, my darling. But you say, God doesn't do anything like that. Oh, doesn't he have? Don't you read your Bible? May I remind you of two occasions when God could not keep silence but did exactly that concerning his well-beloved son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

When dedicating himself on Jordan's banks to bear away the sin of the Lord, audibly the unseen, invisible God says, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. He put his arms around him and assured him that he recognized him in the years of people. And again on the Mount of Transfiguration when he rededicated his life to the same task, God said the same thing, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

Listen to him, he said. Listen to him. He's mine.

He's my child. This is the kind of doctrine that we have in Romans chapter 8 and verse 16 where Paul says the Spirit himself testifies along with our spirits that we are the children of God. Do you know that this morning? My dear friend, visiting friends, is there someone here who doesn't know what this means? Do you know of the Spirit of God coming alongside your spirit and assuring you despite all your failures and all your faults because you believe in Jesus and trust in him, you belong to me.

Has God ever whispered that in your ear? Has the Holy Spirit come near enough to you to assure you you belong to me as part of the ongoing Christian experience? So that the New English Bible, I'm nearly finished. The New English Bible translates this beatitude in this way. How blessed are the peacemakers.

God shall call them his sons. That's it. You are mine.

Many of you this morning may be languishing for a new reassurance of the fact that you are the children of God. You've lost the assurance you had. Shall I tell you the way? And I've no doubt about it.

I'm absolutely sure of it. Follow the way of the beatitudes. Ask God for poverty of spirit in your soul.

Mourn for your sin. Learn the way of meekness. Follow the way of the beatitudes.

And you know what will happen? You'll get involved in peacemaking. The love of Christ will constrain you, to use a Pauline phrase, and you find you want to share the peace of God with all who are at war with themselves, and at war with others, and at war with heaven. And God will bless you with a knowledge that you're not only involved in his business, you're a child of the family.

As I conclude, let me ask a question. Could there be someone among us this morning who's never set out on this way seriously? You may have been a church member even, and a communicant. Or you may have been a very good worker in the church, but you've never discovered the true meaning of the first beatitude.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. You always thought of yourself as someone who could enrich the Almighty with your good works and your good deeds and your churchgoing, and make God indebted to you. But the first beatitude says, blessed are the bankrupt in spirit.

Those who come to see that all their righteousnesses, so called, are but filthy rags in the sight of God. That sin stains our loftiest desires and our highest thoughts. And sin marks miserably our attitudes and our spirits as well as our deeds.

And so you can do nothing but cry, I can't, I'm lost. Brother and sister, that's the only place to start. And you've got to turn back from where you are and you've got to come to the opening, the wicked gate of the cross, where you come in.

And I bid you this morning on this holiday Sunday, if you have not begun before, oh my friend, just where you are, sitting in your seat. You don't even need to close your eyes, but you need to be honest with God. Call upon Him to reveal this to you and believe what He says and act on it.

And then follow the way of the beatitudes and see how the Spirit of God will work in you and lead you from one to the other, always deepening the experience as you go on, making you more to mourn for sin, making you more meek, giving you greater hunger after righteousness. And the more the hunger, the more the blessedness. And the more merciful you're able to become, the more the blessedness.

And the more peacemaking you're involved in, the greater the blessedness. And if I may look forward, the more you suffer for righteousness sake, the more the blessedness. That's the message of the beatitudes.

And for you good people who've been on this road even longer than I have, you faithful people of God, you men and women of prayer and of faith and of obedience, you great peacemakers, and there are so many of you around, thank God for you, carry on, be encouraged. So many of us are blessed by your very presence. And your prayers are a benediction to us.

And what you do, but what you are most of all, carry on. Move out into a new fall season and be what God has called you to be and what you are already in process of becoming in very large measure. And may the peace of God that passes understanding garrison your soul from every evil thing and evil happening as we travel toward the sunrise where warfare and sin and separation will be unknown.

Hallelujah. Let us pray. Oh Lord, this book of yours is so remarkable that the light that comes from it is such as to blind us from time to time.

And though we have been long familiar with some of the words and have mouthed them over and over again, yet they have this habit and our experience becomes very much like that of Moses when he saw one bush among the multitudes of bushes in the backwoods of the desert glowing with fire. And in the fire was the great I Am. We have sensed your presence in this text this morning, oh God of peace.

And we are grateful that in a world such as ours with all its perils and all its dangers in this nuclear age, you are a God of peace. Grant to your people individually and corporately more and more to lay the foundation for a peace that is greater than anything that can come about by political action. Precious, though any other kind of peace may be in its way, but enable us to aim at the highest and to be prepared with our Lord Jesus to lay down our lives, to bring it about.

We ask it in his holy name. Amen.

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