

The Peacemakers

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[0 : 0 0] We're working our way on Sunday evenings through the Beatitudes and Jesus at the very beginning of the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount, he goes up the mountain and he speaks this new law but it says he speaks as one that has authority.

And we said from week one that this is like Moses, he's like the new and better Moses going up the mountain all over again to deliver the Ten Commandments all over again. But when Moses gave the Ten Commandments he received them from God and spoke them as a mediator as a prophet but Jesus goes up the mountain and he just opens his mouth.

He speaks as God as one that's got authority and he gives this new law and we've said every week this is the law of discipleship. It's what theologians throughout centuries have called the beautiful life, the description of the blessed life or the beautiful life and it's a life where joy and obedience are all wrapped up together in these nine ways to live, these nine ways to be blessed to live the good life.

And tonight we come to number seven, this is the climactic number, the number of the Sabbath itself, it must be particularly important and that's blessed are the peacemakers.

What is that peacemaking? Why should we pursue it and how do we grow into it? Three things. So first what is it, the definition, peacemaking?

[1 : 3 1] There are four ways that the Bible uses the word peace, four different ways. One of them is the way that the modern world knows the best and that's to say I have serenity, peace in my inner life that I'm okay, I'm okay with who I am, I'm okay with my identity, I feel okay, I'm at peace about this decision.

And the Bible does sometimes refer to that type of peace, the second type of peace though and more common is national peace, it's the type of peace you get at the end of great conflict at the end of war between nations, the kind of peace that we pray for Ukraine to know now, it's the kind of peace that Israel achieved so often through war throughout the Old Testament.

But the third way is interpersonal peace, even the word, the opposite of this particular word peace often literally in the Greek text means to fist fight, you know, it's the opposite of getting in a fist fight with somebody, it's peace between people, between interperson, it's the end of interpersonal conflict, the type of peace that we all seek in the kitchen with our spouses sometimes, at the end of conflict you want peace.

And then fourth and finally is a peace that's very unique in the Bible and it's the peace of total cosmic well-being. You know, it's when all sad things come untrue, it's when everything that's wrong with the world is reversed, the curse is ended and this is of course the famous Hebrew term that many people, non-Christians even know and that's the term in the Old Testament, shalom, a very particular kind of peace, cosmic well-being.

Now, when Jesus says, blessed are the peacemakers, he is only here talking about one of these. And it's actually the third one.

[3 : 25] This is a particular phrase that we see a couple other places that very clearly refers to peacemaking in interpersonal conflict, the type of conflict that we experience in normal life with other people all around us, our colleagues, our neighbors, our wives, our siblings, our spouses, whoever it may be, interpersonal conflict, that type of conflict, that's what he's talking about.

Jesus grew up and lived in an age of when Israel was under Roman occupation and we see very clearly across Matthew that there are all sorts of political tensions hinted at underneath the text that are arising at the time.

Jesus lived under a very tense setting and that meant that he saw a lot of violence in his context. And there was a group of Pharisees that left the Phariseeical tradition as it was practiced and became what was called zealots.

The zealot community was founded in about 6 BC, just a couple of years before Jesus was born and the zealots were essentially Pharisees with guns.

They said, give me liberty or give me death. They wanted the end of all Roman occupation and so they were willing to take the Old Testament, the law of God from the Old Testament and use it to wield towards political revolution and violence.

[4 : 54] Anything that they could do to get out from underneath the yoke of Roman occupation and this meant that the entire realm that Jesus and the disciples lived in was one that was tense and ready for political violence to break out at any given time.

And we even see in Matthew chapter 10, Jesus actually calling a person out of the lifestyle of the zealot and into discipleship. Matthew chapter 10 tells us that Jesus called out Simon the zealot to come and to follow him.

Now, I point that out not to say that there's no such thing as just war and not to say that Jesus is saying here that for the Christian we should say no to all moments of violence.

That's not what he's doing here. Of course, we have a rich tradition of just war thinking throughout Christian history or even. Jesus is not saying that conflict is not important because it is.

Jesus himself said, I came not to bring peace, but to bring a sword. You see, there's a subtext throughout the whole of redemptive history of necessary conflict.

[6 : 02] Instead, what he's doing is he's speaking into a context that had intense political debates, theological debates and racial tension that really caused public quarrel and strife on the streets all the time.

You see, in the public square, there was political dissension and strife and bifurcation. There was theological enmity between different parties and there was immense racial tension.

Now, does that sound familiar? And you see, there's a famous French saying and I won't say it in French, so I don't embarrass myself, but it says that things are always changing and things always stay the same.

Every age in some sense is the exact same and ever since the beginning, intense political strife, intense theological debate and racial tension has marked every age and culture that's ever existed in different ways at different levels from the beginning of time.

And Jesus comes and says, blessed are the peacemakers in that context. Now this term, peacemaker, is an important word. It's a rare word in the New Testament.

[7 : 18] It only comes three times in the whole New Testament and you can hear in the English exactly like it is in the Greek text. It is a compound word. So the author has stuck two words together to make the word peacemaker.

And it's very important to notice this because it does not say, blessed are the peaceful. Because being peaceful just means being quiet and staying to yourself and not causing strife with other people, but no, it says something more.

It's not passive. It's very active verb. It says blessed are those who go and make peace. And this is how John Calvin describes it, by peacemakers, Jesus here means those who not only seek peace and avoid quarrels as far as lies in their power, but those who labor to settle differences among others, who advise all people to live at peace and who take every occasion to counter hatred and strife.

Now there's an Old Testament correspondent to this that we have in the book of Jeremiah. Remember in Jeremiah, Israel had been captured by Babylon taken into Babylonian captivity and God comes to Israel in the midst of a context where there was intense political strife, intense theological debates and racial tension.

And God says, Israel, my people, seek the peace of Babylon. Your job in the midst of a city that hates you even is to seek the shalom, the peace of this great city, even if everybody around you disagrees with everything you think.

[9 : 02] Seek the peace, be a peacemaker in the midst of this context. And look, like Israel and Babylon, like Jesus under Roman occupation and like today, ever since sin entered the world, we have all lived in a pluralistic context.

And what's pluralism? Pluralism is when there are so many philosophies, religions and ideologies all around us in one culture trying to share life together that we disagree so much about what the good life is we don't know how to chase after the common good in any coherent way.

And so the question is always in the pluralistic context, how do we seek common ground with people around us when we can't agree on the common good? We can't agree on what's actually good for society.

What's good for going forward and progressing? We can't agree. So how do we find common ground? And the answer is that most people don't. And so in other words, we fight and we quarrel and we produce strife and we sit up late at night on Twitter at 11 and get into debate after debate with people because we live in a pluralistic society and it's always been that way.

And Jesus says, blessed are those who instead make peace, make peace. Now James, Derek and God's providence, Derek came and read from the text this morning that I framed almost my entire sermon around of James chapter three and four, especially four one, because James in James three and four, he comes and basically gives you an exposition of both proverbs and the Beatitudes.

[10 : 43] And in it, actually, I think James is reading the Beatitudes and just writing. Remember, James was Jesus biological brother. And so that would make a lot of sense. He was raised with Jesus.

He knew Jesus well. And here this is what James says. Here is what he calls the wise life, the wisdom from above. You might call it the beautiful life. And this is exactly what he says.

It's to be this peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy, impartial and sincere. Okay, that's it.

What does it mean to be a peacemaker? This is the Christian posture, the way of Jesus in every age of human history where people don't agree with one another.

Let me read it one more time. To be gentle, open to reason, full of mercy, impartial and sincere.

[11 : 39] Oh boy. Did you hear that list? In the age of social media, hatred and strife and what people think of as the most bifurcated society in all of human history, God says, Christ says, here's the Christian posture.

Even in the midst of conflict, be peaceable, gentle, full of mercy, sincere and open to reason.

And what this means is that Jesus is not saying that there is no need for conflict. We know that because of sin because we do disagree that there's always going to be conflict in every age.

But instead, what he's doing here is trying to chase after. James is saying, look, put on gentleness and mercy and peace and be open to reason and listening precisely because you have to enter into conflict sometimes.

You have to meet people and say, well, I don't agree with that. I don't think that's the way to go. But peace and reasonableness and mercy and gentleness. Now James does one more thing before we move on and this is what Derek pointed out this morning.

[12 : 45] He spells us the reason why we tend to not go the route of gentleness and mercy and peace and we do go the route of quarreling, strife and fighting.

And James spells it out very clearly. He says, what causes fights among you? Okay. He says, is it not the passions that are waging war within you?

So did you, James is saying the reason that we struggle with fighting with others and quarreling with others in damaging ways on the outside is because we don't have peace on the inside.

And he says, here's what we have instead. He said, we struggle on the inside, chapter three, verse 14, instead with bitter jealousy, selfish ambition and boasting in the heart.

Do you hear that? He's saying the reason that we struggle with anger and pride and quarrels on the outside, struggle and anger and strife and quarrels on the outside is because of pride and jealousy and envy and covetousness on the inside.

[13 : 48] He's saying that that's the reason that's why the world is broken is not because first of what's on the outside, but first what's on the inside with the human heart, that the problem is not conflict in itself.

The problem is not engaging with disagreement in itself. The problem is how I approach it because of my own pride. You know, when I'm prideful and I approach a conflict, I say, you know, I say, I can't stand for this.

I can't let this go because disagreement then becomes about actually my own person that if somebody disagrees with me, they've actually attacked me down to the core that I want them to know that I'm better than them and that I'm going to win this thing and I'm going to have it out and I'm going to go 100 Twitter comments deep if that's what it takes to get all the way to the bottom so that I can know that I'm right and that they're wrong.

And he says, the reason we fight in those ways is because fundamentally we struggle with pride. Now look, here's the question.

Here's the question. James and Jesus are begging us to ask, I think, and it's this. When you enter into spaces of disagreement and those will always be around as long as this world is full of sin, those will always be around.

[15 : 03] When you enter into that, what is the motivation at the depths of your heart for disagreeing with someone? And James is saying, is it pride or is it or is it, you know, this is why it's so important to be open to reason, to be merciful because the true goal of all conflict in an age of sin is what?

The true goal. It's not the win. It's to seek the good of the person that you've entered into a disagreement with.

And so what's your motive? When you enter in, when you feel like this, I've got to talk to this person. I've got to, I do need to enter into disagreement. Is it because you love them so much that you want to seek their good?

And that's actually what it means to be a peacemaker, to go forth saying, you know, I actually want, I love them and I want their good. And so I'm going to make peace by trying to gently, reasonably, mercifully enter into discussion, to listen, to bring them along, to help them see the truth, the truth.

All right. Secondly, and briefly, why seek this? Now, I just want to ask this question very quickly. Why seek peacemaking at all?

[16 : 30] And when you, when we ask a question like that, when you say, well, why are you, why am I asking a question like that? Because you might think, why would it ever be necessary to ask why be gentle?

Why be a peacemaker? Why be open to reason? And let me suggest this, that if you're struck by that and say, we don't need to ask a question like that, it may be because either you were raised in the church or you were raised in a place like Scotland that's steeped in a history of Christianity to the point where virtues like peacemaking and gentleness and being open to reason are things that just filter through you like instinct.

You know, you hear that and you say, that's, that's very positive. Of course, we want to be that. But look, let me say this. Whether you're a Christian or you're not tonight, all of us are swimming in the realm that is the modern worldview.

The worldview that we might call, for lack of a better term, secularism. And because we swim in that world, we always have an inner conflict going on.

Not just the inner conflict that we have with our pride and our selfish ambitions, but something else is going on. And let me, let me explain it. The modern worldview says this, it says that this is your past.

[17 : 48] You're an animal. You know, you're, you're, you're now called a homo sapien, but you got here how? Because you were first red and tooth and claw.

You know, you got to where you are today, human being only because of domination of other creatures, of subordination of other beings with wit and selfish ambition.

You rose to the top and that life fundamentally, if there's a philosophy that life has got to be thought of as personal survival above all else. And then your future, that's your past, but your future, your future in the modern worldview is that death is completely natural and that it's normal and that even if you are the last one on earth, eventually the sun is going to burn up and you're going to die either by heat death or cold death.

And there's going to be no creatures and no consciousness left and no memories and no great names and no monuments. And it's all going the way of the dodo. That's your, your past is that you're an animal and you got here through the domination you needed to use red and tooth and claw survival.

That's your ethic and your future is that there's nothing beyond death. And look, and so that means secular people love your neighbor.

[19 : 03] You know, get out there and be a peacemaker. Give away your money, support, be philanthropist, support great causes and be gentle and be open to reason.

And look, I hope you realize that those things don't fit together. They don't work well at all. The secular worldview says you're red and tooth and claw.

That's who you really are from history and that you have no purpose beyond death. And so you need to love your neighbor and you need to be a peacemaker in the city and you need to do good to all that you can.

And that's why Friedrich Nietzsche in the 19th century, he's the greatest atheist philosopher that's ever lived. He said that the young atheist of the late 19th century had tried to kill God, as he put it, in terms of concept, in terms of idea in the secular modern world.

And in large part they succeeded. They convinced so many people to turn away from religion. But Nietzsche pointed out the problem. He said the problem is that all these young people tried to kill God, but they kept all the Christian ethics.

[20 : 06] You know, they said we're all just animals and nothing's beyond death, but you know, you should be a peacemaker. You should do good to your neighbor. You should love your neighbor as much as you can.

Nietzsche said you're trying to kick God out, but you kept all the ethics that was underneath it. That was with it. And that's why the modern world of you is in such turmoil and such conflict, why nothing that the modern world shouts at us ethically from the buses and everywhere else makes any sense.

None of it really fits together because it doesn't have a coherent past or a coherent future to fit the peace narrative that it tries to suggest. And that's why we have to ask the question, why be a peacemaker?

Because everything around us is actually telling us why, why? Just seek comfort. Make as much money as you can. Dominate everybody in your workplace.

Get as comfortable as possible because when you die, there's nothing else. Here's why. Here's why to be a peacemaker. In the second half of this verse, God, Jesus tells us, be a peacemaker because that means you will be called a son of God.

[21 : 20] Peacemakers are called the sons of God. Now Jesus is writing and speaking here into a context that's largely Jewish, but he also has a Gentile audience sitting in front of him.

And the Gentile God fears at the time who believed in the God of Israel. They like the Jews knew something very important about this phrase, sons of God, that it's only used of two different groups in the whole of the Bible.

It's used of the holy angels, the sons of God, and of Israel themselves in the Old Testament. And now Jesus is turning and he's saying, being a son of God, a daughter of God is not about bloodline.

Instead, blessed are the peacemakers because it is them who are the sons and the daughters of God. And last week, Robin said, you know, you can flip these Beatitudes around and read them very correctly.

You can say it like this. The sons and daughters of God are the peacemakers of the world. But in other words, why?

[22 : 29] You see what it's saying? It's saying, why pursue a peacemaking life when the world around you tells you, look, get comfortable as quickly as you can. And if you need to dominate other people to do that, do it.

Why? And this is what it says. It's saying, because peacemaking is what God does. You want to be like God, a child of God, a son of God, a daughter of God, then be a peacemaker in the world because then you reflect the divine agency itself that you look like God.

Well, wrap up this point by saying this. You could come and say to that, you could come and say to that, okay, you're saying that the reason we should be peacemakers is because God is a peacemaker.

And I think back on the Old Testament, a modern person is going to say, well, look, I think back on the Old Testament and I remember the book of Joshua. I remember Chronicles and Kings and I remember the wars and the blood.

And we don't have time to defend this tonight, but let me assert something to you that when you go back through, you work through carefully, you read through the Bible, through all of redemptive history.

- [23 : 42] What you find out is this, that every single thing that God ever did in all of redemptive history was ultimately the divine peacemaking mission of bringing shalom to the world, that even going into conflict with humanity was all about bringing peace, bringing shalom, bringing the shalom that could only come through divine justice, that the only reason God ever brought conflict into the world at all was not because, because nothing else, but that we did it.

We said, I'm at war with God. I'm at enmity with God. I don't want peace with God. And so God, look, the greatest expression in the Old Testament of God's ultimate divine peacemaking mission is in the temple itself.

You know, you look at the heart of the temple and at the heart of the temple, you see blood and you see sacrifice and you see death. But that is God saying to the world that I've come staying my hand of justice in order to give you peace, that even the bloodiness of the temple is all about the fact that God has come to bring peace to the world.

Now at the climax of the Old Testament, and we read it just a little while ago, we saw in Isaiah chapter nine, God says that he was coming as the prince of peace.

In the early, the very late first century BC, just before Jesus was born, when the Roman Empire was established, there was a emperor named Octavian.

- [25 : 19] And he was one of the early emperors, the first emperor, main Caesar of Rome. And it's very likely that Jesus has this context in mind when he says this.

Octavian had defeated all these different tribes across Europe, what we now call Europe. And when he had did that and he had built the Roman Empire for the first time, he stood up very famously, Philo records this for us as well as Josephus, a couple of different historians and he said, he said, I am the peacemaker.

I am the son of God. And he used those two titles for himself. He said, I'm the peacemaker. I'm the son of God. And how did Octavian make peace in the land?

He made peace by going tribe after tribe and saying, bow the knee to me or die. And you see, he did it just like the modern, he said, look, I'm red in tooth and claw.

And you know, I'm an animal and I only get one life. And that life is about empire building and comfort. And so he went and he said, I'll make peace. I'll kill you or you can bow the knee to me.

- [26 : 28] Now look, Jesus Christ in that context where everybody in the Greco-Roman society knew that the emperor is the peacemaker. That's what he named himself, son of God, peacemaker.

Jesus comes. Jesus Christ, the prince of peace comes and how does he make peace? He comes to make peace by letting God himself go to war against him.

He comes and makes peace by becoming the Lamb of God, crushed, cut open. The one who could only then could he take away the sins of the world.

And so this text is saying to us, the reason that you can be a peacemaker today is only if you have been named son or daughter of God because the prince of peace lost all peace for you.

He's the opposite of Octavian. He's the opposite of everybody in the modern world view. He is the true peacemaker. And so finally, let me conclude by saying this thirdly.

- [27 : 29] How do we grow into being like God? Let me tell you two ways in two minutes. Okay. First, there is no growing as a peacemaker unless you first find and have and fight for inner peace.

That's what James says in James four. Why do we fight in coral? Because we're struggling with inner peace. Now look, the gospel comes and says, here's the good news.

The good news is that you can be freed in your inner life from pride and selfish ambition and envy and covetousness and boasting.

The gospel frees you from that. The gospel says to you, you don't need to think much about yourself because before God, you have nothing to offer, but God has come to make peace with you.

God has made you great not because of what you've done, but by the prince of peace going to war with your son. And so you can look in the gospel, you have the freedom to say no to pride.

[28 : 33] And in the gospel, you have freedom to say no to selfish ambition because you can say, look, even if I don't accomplish a lot in my life, because if I was going to accomplish everything I want to do, I'd probably have to dominate people.

I'd probably have to create war and conflict, but I'm okay. I've got the vision of God himself in my future. The gospel's given me that. I can put this away.

And so that means that when you approach disagreement, a necessity of life, you can be freed. You can be free to be only about the good of the other person.

I'm entering into this only because I love them and want their good. Secondly, and finally, objective peace. Now we live in the age of conflict, the digital age.

It's almost a cliché to talk about how we're all bifurcated and divided in the modern world. Let me give you, and I'm just going to read them three postures, three postures to approach objective disagreement in the digital age, in the modern age that we live in.

[29 : 35] Here they are. Because God has made peace with us, we can be one, humble without being defensive. Put on humility in disagreement, not defensiveness.

Because God has made peace with us in the good news of the gospel, we can be secondly, patient, not coercive. So if we're going to be gentle and open to reason, we have to approach disagreement with patients listening, not forceful coerciveness.

Humble rather than defensive, patient, not coercive. And finally, respectful rather than demonizing.

Because God says that every person that we encounter is created in the image of God, we never demonize. We want their good. We respect them.

We want them to put away evil and sin. And so we fight against what God says is wrong with the world and it's sin. We respect the image of God.

[30 : 39] We never demonize. So we're humble rather than defensive. We're patient rather than coercive. We're respectful rather than demonizing. And we do it all.

We do it all. We make peace in these ways. Only because the God of peace has made peace with us first through the Prince of Peace.

Let's pray together. Father, we ask now that you would give us peace in our hearts through the Prince of Peace and we give thanks that you did not go to war with us in the way we deserve.

You went to war for us in the death of Christ on the cross. And so we now ask that you would give us inner peace, that we could put away our pride and our selfish ambitions and our envy and boasting and jealousies and be people that make peace with others around us.

So give us these hearts, Lord. We ask now as we go into our week and we pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Congratulations.

[31 : 55] Thank you.