

Matthew 5:9

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[0:00] I do sit down and turn with me to Matthew chapter 5 and verse 9. Matthew chapter 5 and verse 9. We're going through the Beatitudes and really trying to look at the Beatitudes as a lens for how we view the Christian life.

And so, it seems to me, over church history, many people took the Beatitudes and kind of learnt them, meditated on them, dwelt in them in many ways, and it was such a great blessing to the church.

Often today, we just kind of do the Sermon on the Mount in about five sermons, and there's good things about that. But there's real value, I think, in taking the Beatitudes and chewing on them week by week.

And so, that's where we are. Matthew 5, verse 9. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they should be called sons of God. Everyone loves peace, don't they?

And here's the first really popular word in the Beatitudes. All the other ones we've looked at, can you see them? They've been strange and unpopular.

[1:10] They've been quite unusual. And so, we've seen, as we've gone through the Sermon on the Mount, these Beatitudes, how radical and how disturbing this statement of Jesus is.

And so, there's not many people out there that want to be pure. There's not many people out there who are just dying to mourn, verse 4. There's not a crowd of folk in Ealing, desperate to be meek. It's not very popular. People don't think that hunger and thirst are good things. And even the last two are not valued very highly in our city, are they?

Merciful and pure. But everyone, every person loves peace. Every single one of them. It's universally popular.

And a peacemaker, in theory, would be valued very, very highly, wouldn't they, in our culture? So, there's a prize, isn't there?

[2:10] An annual prize that's given each year for peace. The Nobel Peace Prize. It's a big thing when people win it. It's in the news. It's given from the proceeds of a manufacturer of gunpowder, Nobel.

Universities have peace studies. Peace. There are peace processes. There are peace initiatives. Peace is a good thing. And yet, we live in a world that's pretty bereft of peace.

Out of the last 4,000 years, there have been about 320 years of peace. I don't really know how they work that out. But on a personal level, there's not much peace around our society.

Our society is not notably peaceful. Family breakup. Lockdown and domestic abuse.

Well-being. Stress. Mental health. Those things are so popular, aren't they, to talk about?

[3:19] It's decided as a good thing. Good mental health, people think is elusive and hard to obtain. And so, I think it sharpens our interest when we come to verse 9.

What is Jesus talking about? And so, I want to kind of look at it from three directions. First of all, who we are. Who are we as the people of God? Well, it says, blessed are the peacemakers.

And so, it's really important that the context tells you and I that this doesn't stand on its own. We see that this Beatitudes comes after other Beatitudes.

And so, what you've got in the Beatitudes is a picture, isn't it, of every believer. And they're not a set of unrelated qualities. It's not, well, I'm a decent mourner, and I'm pretty good at purity, or I'm more strong in peacemaking.

No, Jesus is not saying there are eight sorts of people in the church with different sorts of strengths. There are some merciful, some poor in spirit, some who mourn. No, he's saying, here is the picture of Christian character.

[4 : 23] This is what it is to be a true believer in Jesus. This is what it is to be in the kingdom. It's to be true of every single one of us who's a believer. They are the birthmarks, if you like, of what it means to be born again.

They are the signs of the Holy Spirit working in your life and in my life. All of us who claim to be Christians should be characterized by all of these things. And so when Jesus says, blessed are the peacemakers, he's not speaking of some activity out there, which we may or we may not choose to take on as Christian service.

It's a kind of optional extra. He's not foremost, he's not kind of primarily talking about what we do. He's saying this is who we are.

What are we like? What's our character, our personality? And so what we've seen, haven't we, that the Christian is somebody who's a changed person. Somebody who has been transformed by the Holy Spirit.

And so that there is a part of us which works itself out in being a peacemaker. Because this man or woman or boy or girl has been changed by God so we make peace.

[5 : 40] And of course that is one of the weaknesses, isn't it, with human peacemaking. When you try to have a peace process between two communities, it can be too superficial.

Because mere human peacekeeping never deals with the real issue. And the real issue is with what people are like inside. And so you and I can cobble together a peace process.

And while it's made between people who are not peaceable, it'll never be permanent. And so the world, when it talks about peace, it deals with external factors.

And it never deals with the real problem. So in James chapter 4, verse 1, if you turn there if you want to, you'll find that there's a really profound analysis. James says, what causes fights?

What causes quarrels among you? Think about that. There's a quarrel in a church. Or there's an argument in a church. And there's hostility in a family, maybe. Or in the workplace.

[6 : 46] What causes that? What is behind that? Well, you could look, couldn't you, at all sorts of external factors. And say, it's because of this. It's because of lack of sleep.

It's because of lockdown. It's because of the pressure people are under. But James goes way deeper than that. He says, don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

You see, the reason that there are conflicts and arguments, and quarrels, and fights, is because of the people we are. It is the sin within us.

And so most human effort at peacekeeping is rather like, isn't it, trying to clean up a river downstream from where the pollution is coming into the river.

And you and I need to remember that blessed are the peacemakers is the seventh beatitude. It doesn't stress, it doesn't stand alone.

[7 : 48] So, blessed are the peacemakers is addressed to people who are, look at verse three, poor in spirit. So it's saying that you and I, as Christians, we are not to be proud.

We're not to be arrogant. We're not to be people that know it all. We're not to try and dominate. We're to recognize our own personal guilt and our own personal weakness and our own wrongdoing that actually you and I are like beggars before God.

And we are to be people, verse four, who mourn. That is, we're really sorry and we're ashamed for our own sin and for our own weaknesses. And that leads, doesn't it, verse five, to make us meek.

So we're not always trying to get our own way all the time. We're not trying to manipulate the situation so we get our way. We don't try to get everyone to follow us. We don't think we always know best.

We remember our own weakness and our own frailty and our own guilt. And we're meek. And because we recognize that, we long above everything else for holiness, verse six, for righteousness.

[9 : 05] We long for God's will to be done. And so we are merciful because we find it easy to forgive and forget. And we find it easy to pardon our fellow human beings.

We're not judgmental. We're not harsh. And we don't have long memories. Why? Because the Christian recognizes that God has forgotten our sins. And because God has forgotten our sins, so we have to be willing to forget the sins of others.

And so the person who was described here doesn't bring things up from years ago and use them as clubs to beat people over the head with. Because God would never do that with us. God never says, you're always doing this.

Remember you did that five years ago? And so we're merciful people. And we're pure in heart with a single eye for God and for his glory.

And then having said all of that, Jesus then says, he says, and blessed are the peacemakers. because we see ourselves in a new way as a result of the Beatitudes.

[10:18] We're not nearly as important as we once thought we were. We're not nearly as clever as we once thought we were. We're not nearly as good as we thought we were.

We're a lot humbler. And we're a lot more realistic about ourselves and about others. And we see other people in a new way.

And we love them. And when we see their faults, we know that we have faults. And because we've experienced mercy, we are merciful towards them and meek towards them.

Because love covers over a multitude of sins. So blessed are the peacemakers. And we take on the essential character of peacemakers.

It's not a mask that we wear. It's not a duty that we give ourselves to. It's not a course that we go on. What is being a peacemaker?

[11:22] It is the overflow of real spirituality. And so please don't take verse 9 out of its context and kind of out of its place in the sermon.

What I'm saying or what I'm trying to say is that for all the benefits of peace to come, you and I need to be changed people. We need to be pure in spirit and mourning and meek and merciful.

And you can't have peace without that. And so I'm saying as we consider this text, it's vital to consider the other text. It's vital for you and I to work out our own spiritual growth.

That is our reading of scripture, our prayer, our putting sin to death, our dealing with ourselves, our growing in faith and love.

because that's all part of the picture. There are no shortcuts into becoming a peacemaker. You can't take it up as a hobby or a little extra Christian activity.

[12:32] And so the truth is this, isn't it? It is probably too late in church, in a church, when trouble comes to be thinking then and only then of being peacemakers.

Because when trouble comes in a church or a family, it doesn't just come like that. People always say that to me. They always say, we didn't see it coming.

It just came out of nowhere. It never comes out of nowhere. Never, ever. In a church context, the rot sets in normally years after earlier.

There's been a failure in vital godliness. And then you see the fruit of it. And the problem didn't arise in a week, one meeting, or a month.

It had been something that had been going on for a long time. And so you've got to keep the verse in its context. Who we are, changed people, people in whom God's spirit is working, people who are growing in Christ.

[13:35] And so it points to who we are. Secondly, it points to what we do. What we do. So in verse 9, blessed are the peacemakers. And so we need to begin with a couple of negatives, don't we?

Peacemakers are not people who are easygoing, who avoid confrontation. They're not wimps. Peacemakers are not weak, and they're not ineffectual, and they're not cowards, and they're not compromising.

And that's not what Jesus is talking about, isn't he? Peace has to be based on truth and righteousness. And in reality, sweeping things under the carpet, it doesn't make peace.

Ignoring wickedness doesn't make peace. God speaks, doesn't he, in Jeremiah 6, verse 14, they're famous verses. And he speaks to the preachers of the day, the leaders of the day, and he says, you dress the wound of my people as if it wasn't serious.

You say, peace, peace. But there is no peace. And so in your own marriage, and in your own family, and in your own home, to sweep things under the carpet is not making peace.

[14:49] To bury things in the sand is not making peace. To ignore something is not what our Lord is talking about here. And he's not just speaking about peace keepers, if I can put it like that.

They're vital, aren't they? We are to be people who are peaceable. We're to control our tempers. Proverbs 15, 18 says, a hot-tempered man stirs up dissension.

We'll control our speech. Proverbs 15, verse 1, a gentle answer turns away wrath. But a harsh word stirs up anger.

We've got to avoid gossip. It's a plague, isn't it? And it's a curse in church life. So Proverbs 26, 20 says, without a wood, the fire goes out. Without gossip, a quarrel dies down.

And we have to be peaceable people. We'll see later on in Romans, the Apostle Paul says, as far as it's possible, live at peace with everyone. And so we've got to be peaceable, men and women and boys and girls, not always looking for a fight.

[16:01] But I think there's more than that here that Jesus is saying. He is saying, blessed are the peacemakers, not just those who keep the peace, as important as that is. It's going further than that, isn't it?

It's making peace. It is bringing peace. It is creating peace. It is establishing peace. It's a very positive, dynamic quality.

And so, when we think of peace, how do we think of it in our culture? We think of peace as the absence of war. But in the Bible, the word peace is far richer, far more beautiful.

It's a far more beautiful concept. peace in the Bible is a state of well-being and wholeness and prosperity and safety and blessing.

So with us, the way we think of peace, we think of peace as the absence of something. The absence of war or the absence of fighting. But in the Bible, peace is the presence of something.

[17:10] It is the presence of wholeness and prosperity and soundness and blessing. It's a positive thing. So being a peacemaker is much richer. It is much more wonderful than stopping fights.

Being a peacemaker is creating wholeness and wellness and prosperity. peacemakers and so peacemakers repair gaps.

Peacemakers heal preaches. Peacemakers bring people together. Peacemakers want to create unity and soundness to create God's shalom.

God's peace. for you and I to be peacemakers that will mean we've got to listen listen to people to take time to understand what they're saying and where they're coming from and very often to differentiate between what they say and what they mean because people often don't always say what they mean or mean what they say and so as we listen we are asking what is this person trying to communicate to me peacemakers want to reduce tension and look for solutions not to describe problems or make them worse peacemaking is positive and constructive and healing so Paul says in Romans 14 verse 19 let us make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification and so above all isn't it above everything else what peacemaking surely means is telling the gospel to people because that is isn't it the finest and the most ultimate and the most permanent and the most constructive way of making peace telling people of a God in heaven who has sent his son the Lord Jesus Christ the saviour so that you and I can have peace with God and as we've seen in Romans peace with God is not just absence of hostility it's not just that the war is over but there's wholeness and blessing fullness the fruit of the spirit

Galatians 5.22 the fruit of the spirit is love joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness and self-control and so when you have people filled with the Holy Spirit you will have peace and so what we do is we're to be healers builders facilitators bringing people together to bring God's shalom to the earth that's part of our family calling isn't it that is part of the creation mandate of Genesis 1.27 to rule and subdue the earth it is to bring order and beauty out of the chaos in God's world subduing the earth who we are and what we do and then lastly who we resemble who do we resemble blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God it's sometimes mistranslated children of God but it's sons of God our children refers to our status sons refers to our nature we're all aren't we part of the bride of Christ

[20:52] I hope you men rejoice in that we are part of the bride of Christ there's no kind of sexist in this when the New Testament speaks about the sons of God we are all sons in the son there's nothing sexist for you women in being sons of God our identity our character Jesus is saying we are the offspring of God we bear the likeness of our father and he says if we are peacemakers we will be recognized by other people and they will say ah they are sons of God they will be known and acknowledged as sons of God like the son of God and we can really understand that can't we easily understand that because God as we saw this morning God is the great peacemaker isn't that the whole history of redemption from the moment that Adam and Eve fall to the second coming of the Lord Jesus

Christ what is it the story of the whole of the Bible is the story of God bringing peace to his disturbed and disordered world and the gospel is the gospel of peace the good news of peace Satan came into the garden of Eden and he disrupts the space he came into and he breaks the unity he breaks

what is it in Eden is it just in the absence of war no there's shalom in Eden isn't there there's fullness there's wholeness there's beauty and Satan comes and he disturbs that and yet God in his plan of redemption has sent his son into this world to heal the world he is the prince of peace and God promised this doesn't he I will make a covenant of peace with them and the Lord Jesus when he left his disciples do you remember what he said he said he breathed on them and said peace be unto you and the apostle Paul as he calls

God's blessing unto people what does he say he says grace mercy and peace to you and so when Jesus returns he will bring with him the complete and everlasting peace of God and in that promise in Isaiah Jesus is who he is the prince of peace and so God is the God of peace and his work is in that of bringing peace and wholeness and unity and soundness and blessing that's what we look forward to when we come to the Lord's table when there will be wholeness and unity and soundness and blessing and we will partake of the wedding supper of the Lamb and so what I think Jesus is saying to us is that when we make peace we are God like we are God like and truly that's tremendously encouraging isn't it to us we make peace with a friend we've had an argument with someone there's been a coldness between us or a quarrel so I need to say to you this it is a God like thing and it is a Christ like thing to make peace to go to that person and make peace when our children have been angry with us and they're irate with us we put our hand on their shoulder and we tell them that we love them and we speak gently to them and wisely and we make peace that is a God like thing that is a Christ like thing and when you go to two friends who've fallen out with each other and you pray and you talk with them and you seek to help them understand and to help each other and to forgive each other and you try to bring them together as best you can that is a God like thing and a Christ like thing to go into a church when it's divided and to try and bring people together and not make the situation worse that is a God like thing to do and a Christ like thing to do and God says blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the sons of God we resemble God when we make peace in some ways I could finish there but I think we need to see the challenge of these verses because it's all very well and good for me to say to you it is God like when you make peace and that's a great encouragement but we need to understand how did God make peace so let me read you from Colossians chapter 1 it was our assurance of pardon this morning Colossians chapter 1 and verse 19 for in him that's the Lord Jesus Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile that's to make peace to bring back together to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven making peace by the blood of his cross peace and so if there's anything that's clear in the

[26 : 24] New Testament it's this it is this that it costs God to make peace and making peace is costly one of the Puritans said the God who said let there be light could not say let there be peace the God who said let there be light could not say let there be peace because God had to make peace and God made peace through the blood of his son shed on the cross and peace making in the Bible the gospel tells us is very very costly and so tonight as we come to this table we rejoice in God because we have come to peace with God through the life and death of the blessed son of God and as you eat of the bread and as you drink of the wine it reminds you of the cost of peace this is my body given for you this is my blood shed for you and so it is with us chapter 5 verse 1 seeing the crowds he ran up on the mountain and when he sat down his disciples came to him and so what you've got in the sermon on the mountain is you've got him speaking to the disciples with the crowd listening in and amongst that crowd there would have been hardline right wing conservative

Jewish nationalists and as Jesus preached to them that day they hated the Romans they were desperate that the Romans would be got rid of out of their land and their eyebrows would have been raised and they would have sneered when Jesus said blessed are the peacemakers it was a hard thing for Jesus to say in a kind of politically charged atmosphere but think for a moment what did it mean for Jesus when he says this that when he says blessed are the peacemakers for they should be called sons of God he knows what it will cost him to make peace that he was going to die on a cross to make peace it's not sentimental is it he would lay his body on the line to make peace the peace that we enjoy blessed are the peacemakers and I need to say to you it is costly if we're going to do this and so this week who is there that you can make peace with and there will be situations

I expect for the people in this room in your family in your circle in your friendships in this church even where the Holy Spirit is speaking to you through this verse and saying to you you need to

make peace and making peace pleases God and I don't say that sentimentally I know that is costly and for peace to be made it may well be absorbing an awful lot of pain and an awful lot of hurt and coming to the Lord Jesus and saying I can only do this in your strength sometimes being accused being a peacemaker is accused of being a compromiser it's often that in church life sometimes when you try to make peace people will say why don't you just mind your own business nothing to do with you people won't understand but what a way to spend our lives blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God and we follow a saviour who made peace and he made peace at the cost of his life as it seems to me that we are never more Christ-like and we are never more God-like than when we're seeking to make peace and it may be for you that it's a very small and limited way that whatever way this week you can make peace but when you do that blessed are you that you should be called sons of God let's pray