

2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters
Sermon Series - Focus on The Heart
Sermon Title - Blessed are the Peacemakers
Sermon Text - Matthew 5:9/Romans 12:9-21
Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of His glory and grace”

That’s probably the most radical hymn ever written! I want us to pray and then I’m going to tell you why I believe that! Pray!

Here’s why that hymn is so radical: Because world economies would tank if people ever did that! And here’s the reason: Economies are driven by consumers consuming. Consuming bigger and better and believing the lie that more is always better! And when we think of the things of this earth, we are quick to think of “material things.” But when it comes to refocusing our hearts, and our eyes on Jesus, we’ve got to think about the other things of the world that are always demanding our focus. Like the desire to always be right, my way or the highway! Like the desire to always be in control, having power over others! Like the desire to be more successful than others so as to have the bragging rights! Like the desire to demand my rights at all cost, as opposed to laying down my rights for the greater good of others! I don’t know if you realize what I’ve just done, but I’ve given you some of the most basic reasons there’s not peace in our world. The reason there’s no peace in many families, in many communities, in many countries and even in some churches! And unless and until we turn our eyes upon Jesus and look full in His wonderful face, and let Him be the Lord of our lives, our priorities, our pursuits, our goals, and our desires then the things of this world will continue to rob us of real peace both inside and out! Jesus made this statement in His seventh beatitude at the beginning of His Sermon on the Mount...

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

This begs the question, or questions...

Who qualifies as a peacemaker? What does a peacemaker do and not do? Why are peacemakers blessed? And why are they called children of God?

Who qualifies as a peacemaker? A person who is at peace with God!

Isaiah said this...

Isaiah 26:3 You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.

Isaiah 26:4 Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal.

People whose minds are steadfast are steadfast because they trust in God! And when we trust in God He will keep us in perfect peace no matter the battles that rage around us! In fact, the Psalmist said this...

Psalm 91:1 Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

Psalm 91:2 I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

Psalm 91:3 Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence.

So a person who is at peace with God is a person who trusts in God and dwells in the presence of God! And what does this have to do with being a peacemaker? I'm glad you asked. If you aren't at peace with God, you will have a hard time being a peacemaker because you will have little or no peace in your own heart! And when you are not at peace with yourself you will find it difficult, if not impossible to be at peace with others! So peace with God is vital when it comes to being a peacemaker. What keeps a person from being at peace with God? Well, there could be multiple things. Maybe they haven't accepted His offer of love and friendship, either because they don't believe in God or don't think He would really love them enough to forgive their past wrongs. Or maybe they have things in their life they know are not pleasing to God and are hesitant to give those things over to God. If we are living according to the flesh and not the Spirit we cannot be at peace with God. Paul gives us insight as to why this is the case in Romans 8...

Romans 8:5 Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

Romans 8:6 The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.

Romans 8:7 The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

Romans 8:8 Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

James tells us this...

James 4:1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

James 4:2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.

James 4:3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

James 4:4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

So a person who is at peace with God is a person who has chosen friendship with God to be more important than the friendship and acceptance of the world! They've decided to trust God's

love and offer of forgiveness and have decided to dedicate their lives to Him and with the help of The Holy Spirit, live for Him! Paul said this in Romans 5...

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Romans 5:2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

Who qualifies as a peacemaker? A person who is at peace about putting others above themselves!

Paul gave a really good description of what it looks like to put others ahead of ourselves in Romans 14 and if we follow this we will have the second important quality of a peacemaker...

Romans 14:12 So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

Romans 14:13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.

Romans 14:14 I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean.

Romans 14:15 If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died.

Romans 14:16 Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil.

Romans 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,

Romans 14:18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.

Romans 14:19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

Romans 14:20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.

Romans 14:21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.

Are we Christ-like? He put others ahead of Himself! He put you above Himself! Are we truly Christ-followers or are we just seeking the same things as the world, but in the name of Jesus? Success, achievement, climbing the ladder at any cost, impressing others, but not really caring about others. Maybe it's time we started living for something bigger than ourselves. Greater than ourselves. A God sized dream, a God sized vision! Remember what Jesus prayed for His disciples and for us...

John 17:20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,

John 17:21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

John 17:22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—

John 17:23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Sounds like Jesus wanted His children to be peacemakers! Are we willing to lay down our personal dreams and goals for Jesus' kingdom dream? Are we willing to become peacemakers in this world? Sometimes a peacemaker will lay down their rights for the sake of others and for the good of God's Kingdom! And that naturally leads us to the next question...

What does a peacemaker do and not do?

So much! Paul gives us a list in Romans 12 of things that I believe apply to peacemakers! While Paul was not specifically addressing the subject of peacemaking, he mentions living in harmony with one another in the middle of this passage, so I think we can apply this to peacemaking. Peacemakers really care, they really listen, and then they speak the truth in love. Paul gives us such amazing detail that I believe can be applied to what a peacemaker does and doesn't do!

As we read what Paul says here in Romans 12:9-21, I will share some thoughts and commentary as it relates to being a peacemaker. Paul says...

Romans 12:9 Love must be sincere...

In other words, not fake, false, or fabricated! It's got to be from the heart!

Romans 12:9 ...Hate what is evil;

Notice Paul said hate what is evil not the person who does evil!

Romans 12:9 ...cling to what is good.

Cling to, hold on to, don't let go of what is good, be committed to doing good!

Romans 12:10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.

We just talked about that, and devotion to one another requires that we put others needs above our own, devotion is enthusiastic loyalty! Are you enthusiastic about your loyalty to others or is it an obligation? A true peacemaker has to be devoted to the cause.

Romans 12:11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, Zeal is great energy or enthusiasm in pursuit of a cause or an objective.

We should never be lacking in zeal, but Paul says we must keep our spiritual fervor...

According to the Oxford Dictionary, Fervor is an intense and passionate feeling.

We should never be lacking in fervor, but Paul makes it clear that our zeal and fervor must be found in...

Romans 12:11 ...Serving the Lord!!

If we have zeal and fervor for our personal opinions and for wanting to always be right, and are prideful about being right, then that is not conducive to being a peacemaker! I believe we should spend copious amounts of energy and enthusiasm when it comes to living in harmony with one another and especially in God's Family the church! In fact Paul goes on to say we are to...

Romans 12:12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

One verse three truths and when you look at this verse in its context, you realize it's talking about hope, patience, and prayer as they pertain to relationships. This verse is sandwiched between Paul's instructions to be devoted to and honor one another, and to live in harmony with one another. So our relationships should be characterized by joyful hope! A belief in the very best in others. Hoping for the very best in others and a willingness to help others be their very best. A peacemaker must have this joyful hope if they have any possibility of bringing peace to a situation! And what of this "patient in affliction" statement? Making peace can be grueling because the very fact that there's a need for peacemaking brings with it the reality of offended parties, hurt feelings, and different opinions! And when you have those things, there's going to be tough things said and sometimes they will be directed at the peacemaker! That will cause affliction, which is pain and suffering! The peacemaker can't take it personally. And how could anyone be that strong! Paul tells us in this triad...

Romans 12:12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

You can't be a peacemaker if you're not willing to be faithful in prayer. Peacemaking requires copious amounts of prayer! In prayer we find God's peace in our own hearts and we open the door for God's guidance through The Holy Spirit and through God's Word! And what Paul tells us next, while he was not specifically talking about the concept of peacemaking, certainly contains valuable instructions for peacemaking...

Romans 12:13 Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Notice that Paul said to share with the Lord's people who are in need, not with those who are in need who agree with you on everything! He follows this with saying to practice hospitality. People have forgotten how to be hospitable and civil! That's not only sad, it's also dangerous. Please understand that I'm not advocating that we lose our convictions or give up our God-given

morals and standards. What I am saying is that we must understand that for us to be peacemakers, we have to be willing to see people's needs which go beyond their ideologies, and we need to practice hospitality, kindness, and concern if we ever hope for people to listen to our gospel message. Sometimes the way we act speaks so loudly that it drowns out everything we are trying to say about God's love! Again, there's also God's truth, and we dare not compromise or water down, or hide His truth, but the way we share that truth is critical! Truth and mercy must coexist or there will be no peace. Dr. John Townsend shared this in a conference I attended back in February.

"You will not get to them with the truth until they experience your grace!"

John's Gospel says this about Jesus...

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus was full of grace and truth and we need to be full of the same things. I think the order of the words is important...Grace and Truth. Let them see your grace and pray that they will hear the truth you hope to share. It's the way of a peacemaker. However, not everyone will respond positively to a peacemaker. Not everyone responded well to Jesus. But Paul goes on to tell us that we are to...

Romans 12:14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

This is probably one of the hardest things to do or to not do. When someone curses us or speaks evil of us, we want to speak back. We want to lash out. We want to defend ourselves. Our flesh naturally wants to fight. But listen to the wisdom of God's Word concerning this in James...

James 3:6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

James 3:7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man,

James 3:8 but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

James 3:9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.

James 3:10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

If we could only be like Christ with this one.

Isaiah 53:7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

Jesus laid down His rights and did not defend Himself because He wanted to take our punishment for us. Maybe we should do less fighting for our rights and more laying down our rights in order to live in peace with one another. But we must also understand that we are to...

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

Wouldn't our world be more peaceful if we rejoiced with the good fortune of others instead of being jealous of their blessings? In fact we read these verses recently, but it sure pertains to peacemaking. It's James 3:16-17...

James 3:16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

James 3:17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

And speaking of being considerate, Paul had not only said to rejoice with those who rejoice, but to...

Romans 12:15 ...mourn with those who mourn.

What would happen if we were to truly mourn with those who mourn. I'm talking about taking the time to be there for people in their time of loss, hurt, and grief. We may not have any answers for them, but simply being there for them, and walking with them, will let them know someone cares and that will communicate God's love to them! And it may not be just during the loss of a loved one, but when someone is mourning difficult circumstances in life. Being a peacemaker is not just about keeping the peace between people, but it is also about bringing a sense of God's peace to people who are hurting. In fact Paul continues his instructions with these words which includes more things a peacemaker is to do, but also includes things a peacemaker should never do. Paul says...

Romans 12:16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Living in harmony with one another speaks to me of being a peacemaker! And not being proud, but being willing to associate with people of low position, indicates to me that a peacemaker is willing to walk with people who are struggling in life! They could be struggling because of poor decisions they've made, and while we do not want to be guilty of enabling someone to continue making irresponsible decisions, if we can help them do better and if they desire to do better, then we need to bring God's peace into their situation and help them. And I love what Paul said...

Romans 12:16 ...Do not be conceited.

Have you ever heard the old saying...

"Except for the grace of God there go I!"

Never forget the grace, the mercy, the blessings and the help God has given you in your life! Remembering where we've come from and God's love for us helps protect us from being conceited! Paul then gives really important advice for peacemakers, and for anyone who considers themselves to be a follower of Jesus Christ...

Romans 12:17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.

This is another way of putting the "Golden Rule!" Jesus said...

Matthew 7:12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Did you notice, Jesus says do unto others what you would want them to do unto you, not what they do unto you. The world has rewritten the golden rule.

"Do unto others before they do unto you"

That's just so un-Christlike! While you will never be able to please everyone, you should make sure that the problem is not because of un-Christlike attitudes or actions on your part!

Peter said this...

1 Peter 3:15 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

1 Peter 3:16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

Paul continues with this extremely important truth that will help anyone wanting to be a peacemaker...

Romans 12:18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

This means we all must ask the question: "Have I done all I can do to make peace?" Ask it honestly and deeply. Have I really done everything I can do? Have I been willing to go the extra mile? Have I been willing to lay down my pride? And if the answer to those questions is yes, why would Paul say "if it is possible?" Because it is sad but true that some people, no matter how hard you try, and no matter how genuine you are in your attempts to make peace with them, some folks will hold on to their hate and will seek to sabotage any attempts at peace! So when you've done all that you can, asked for forgiveness if you've wronged someone, and

sought to make amends if possible, but the offended party refuses to accept your desire for peace, you have to realize you've done what you could. Put it in God's hands and leave it there! And it could be that you've offered forgiveness, if you were the one hurt, but the other person continues to wrong you and hurt you! At this point you may have to realize that until they are willing to get right with God, your pursuit of peace with them may no longer include engagement with them! You'll just have to pray for peace and pray for the person! Whatever you do, Paul says...

Romans 12:19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

Only God has the wisdom and the proper perspective to avenge or to bring justice! But here's an amazing thing, you might find that God may open an opportunity at some point for you to re-engage. Paul says instead of taking revenge...

Romans 12:20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

Verse 20 is a direct quote from Proverbs. So what's this heap burning coals upon their head thing? Sounds kind of violent. There's a lot of different opinions on what heaping burning coals on their head means! However, it could be as simple as this: when we don't try to enact justice but choose instead to be kind to those who aren't kind to us, we allow the Holy Spirit of God to use our actions to bring the burning conviction of God on them, with the hopes they will see the error of their ways and change! And then Paul gives this advice which I think really applies to a peacemaker...

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

We don't want evil to overcome us, we want to overcome evil with good. Once again, living at peace with one another does not mean that you lay down your God-given convictions. To do that would destroy your peace with God and yourself, for the conviction of the Holy Spirit would not allow you to have peace if you abandoned morality, truth, justice, and right living. But there is a way to hold to your convictions without being mean or hateful. Others may hate you for standing up for what is right, but if you do it in a firm, but gentle and loving way, then it's on them and not on you! Listening to someone share their opinion is not you accepting or embracing their opinion, however, it is showing respect for that person as a fellow human being and being willing to hear them out. Hopefully that person will then respect you as a fellow human being and will listen to you share your thoughts and maybe even share the gospel! There are too many people in our country, including some who consider themselves followers of Christ who seem ready and anxious for a fight! Some people seem to want a civil war. But I'm here to tell you that will not be the glorious thing some imagine in their minds. Once again, I know there are times when you have to stand for what is right even when the costs are high. Many of our veterans know the high cost of war and I thank God for their willingness to put their lives on the line for the freedoms we enjoy. Thank you and God bless you for your service. What I want to do

now is end with a true story from our nation's history, a quote and a Scripture. How many of you have heard of The Battle of Manassas, or the Battle of Bull Run? It was the first battle of the Civil War, July 21st, 1861. You might not know this, but it became known by another name...the Picnic Battle! I read this in a Smithsonian article...

“Bull Run, the first land battle of the Civil War, was fought at a time when many Americans believed the conflict would be short and relatively bloodless,” writes the Senate Historical Office. That’s part of the reason why civilians did go out to watch it. And yes, many did bring food. It’s also hard to assess what kinds of watchers there were—men, women and children according to some sources, but mostly men, according to others. For these picnickers, the battle wasn’t just a spectator sport. It was important politically—so politicians attended; it was important socially—so journalists attended; and it was an opportunity to sell food—so food-sellers attended.”

From the Smithsonian Magazine, Kat Eschner, July 21, 2017

The battle became one of the most gory and bloody of the Civil War with nearly five thousand dead or wounded. It was tragic what those men, women and children saw that day! Folks, if our nation were to enter into another Civil War, it would be no picnic! Somehow, we as Christ followers need to be on our knees crying out for God to help us become peacemakers in a world of hate, strife and war! We need to be praying for a true spiritual awakening. We need to pray, Lord, let it begin in me! Jesus said...

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Why are peacemakers blessed and why will they be called children of God?

Frank Stagg said this in the Broadman Commentary...

Jesus is the “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6). He is our peace (Eph. 2:13 f.). Peacemaking is positive and active, not passive. Jesus plunged into the midst of human life to bring order out of chaos, reconciliation out of estrangement, love in the place of hate. Israel had been designated “son” of God (Hos. 11:1). Jesus taught that God’s sons are those who are joined together with him in his work of peacemaking. To be called is to be, for the name reflects the nature. Although peace includes the ending of war and strife, it is more. It is harmony with man through harmony with God.”

Frank Stagg, “Matthew,” in Matthew–Mark, ed. Clifton J. Allen, Broadman Bible Commentary (Broadman Press, 1969), 105–106.

Peter sums it up for us beautifully...

1 Peter 3:8 Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.

1 Peter 3:9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

1 Peter 3:10 For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech.

1 Peter 3:11 They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it.