

The Messiah Has Come
Week 14
Matthew 5:9-12
“Peaceful, Yet Persecuted”

Introduction

If the world hates you, understand that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you. Remember the word I have spoken to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his Master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will also keep yours. But they will do all these things to you on account of My name, because they don’t know the One Who sent Me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now they have no excuse for their sin. **John 15:18-22**

As Christ continued to teach how to be happy (*blessed*) according to God, He eventually came to the most controversial conclusion. Simply put, He called His followers to be “peacemakers” and then assure them that they would be hated all the more for doing so! And yet, He continued to insist that in this path, they would find true and lasting happiness and joy! I cannot help but wonder if there was a mass exodus from the mountainside, as the beatitude portion of His message came to a close. After all, everything that The Savior taught about happiness was, and still is, the exact opposite of what the world says is the path to contentment. In order to be what Christ has commanded, we must die to self, and this world is clamoring to elevate self above all else.

As we have previously discussed in this study, this world’s wisdom has an obvious flaw. If putting one’s self above everything were the means to lasting joy, then why is the world so miserable? To value one’s own desires and opinions more than anything else leads to strife and discontentment. That is why there has been war after war on this planet, and the trend only seems to be on the increase. There are those who believe that mankind is actually evolving toward peace! But a quick glance at the evening news will reveal that if this is the case then, he is doing a very poor job of it!

When everything else fails, trust God’s Word, for it is the only credible source of wisdom in this miserable world. So listen to what The Word tells us about man’s lust to gratify self:

What is the source of wars and fights among you? Don’t they come from your passions that wage war within you? You desire and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and wage war. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and don’t receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. You adulterous people! Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? So whoever wants to be the friend of the world becomes the enemy of God. **James 4:1-4**

So to be clear, to be in step with this world’s way of thinking is to be at odds with God. And what the *beatitudes* are really all about, is teaching us how to be reconciled to God and to find true and lasting joy as a result. Christ lays out for us the progression of going from enmity with God to perfect peace with Him. It starts with humility and brokenness that leads to justification by faith (poor in spirit, mourning, humility **vs. 2-5**). Then as we are transformed by The Spirit we are sanctified (hungering for righteousness, merciful, and pure in heart **vs. 6-8**). Then as we are being recreated in the image of Christ, this world begins to oppose us all the more, for we are an offense to them. So in this final section of the beatitudes we will discover that “*Happy are the Peacemakers who are Persecuted.*”

Happy Are The Peacemakers (vs. 9)

Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God **Matthew 5:9**

In order for us to fully understand what Jesus calls a “peacemaker”, we must first remember the verse from James that we read earlier:

...Don't you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? So whoever wants to be the friend of the world becomes the enemy of God. **James 4:4b**

I think that even most church members struggle with this reality. When we were lost, consumed with the disease of “self-love”, living to gratify our base sinful nature..., we were God’s enemies! When The Holy Spirit revealed to us our lost and depraved condition, we had but two choices. We could either humble ourselves and cry out to God for forgiveness, or reject the truth and remain God’s enemies. There are no other options. The question always comes down to what we choose to do with Jesus, either place our faith in Him or be lost forever, separated from a Holy God.

When we humble ourselves and surrender our lives over to Christ as LORD, we are not only forgiven, but reconciled through the shed blood of Christ to God. We go from being enemies of God to adopted *sons and daughters!* And they wonder why the gospel is called “*the good news!*” So when it comes to our reconciliation, Christ is the ultimate peacemaker, for He died to bring us back into right standing with God.

Now, because of the miracle of our reconciliation, Christ now lives within every Believer. He is in us and we in Him. That means that His personality, His qualities, if you will, begin to shine through from within us (*Fruit of The Spirit Galatians 5:22-25*). And just as He was willing to give His very life to reconcile us to God, we too long to offer up our lives to bring others to the very same reconciliation that we have received. In short... we become *peacemakers*, longing for others to have the peace with God that we have been given in Christ Jesus. Show me a Believer who does not long to see other lost people saved, and I will show you an imposter. Those with genuine faith, long to share that faith with the lost and dying.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come! Everything is from God, Who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:17-18

So, to be in Christ is to become a peacemaker, just as Christ was for us! The very purpose of The Church is to go and make disciples (**Matthew 28:16-20**). It is the greatest honor a Believer can have to lead others to the cross of Christ and see them reconciled to God, by grace, through faith! No wonder Christ proclaimed from the mountaintop, ***“Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the sons of God!”***

While we are on the subject of peacemaking, I would be remiss if I didn’t at least discuss the three types of peace that God gives to every Believer. First, we have the “*Peace with God*”, which refers to the reconciliation that we just learned about. Through Christ we go from being God’s enemies to God sons and daughters. We have been granted by grace, Peace with God.

The second type of peace that we have as Believers is the “*Peace of God*”. This refers to the inner peace that every Believer has in the knowledge that no matter their circumstances, ***we know that all things work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28)***. Therefore, come what may, we know that we are secure in Him, and that knowledge gives us the “Peace of God”.

Don't worry about anything, but in everything through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

And finally, we have the “Peace from God”, this comes when we do as Paul says and make our request known to God. When we have a critical decision to make, we get our own wills and wants out of the way, and we seek God’s guidance. We pray until God has given us the peace with which to proceed. I cannot tell you how many times over the years that Sandi and I have prayed together for God’s will and waited upon The LORD until He gave us the right direction. There is a peace that comes over a person when they know that they are absolutely in the will of God. I call it, “peace at the core” when I know deep in my innermost heart of hearts that what I am about to do, I am doing with the full assurance that it is God’s will. That, my friends, is the “Peace that comes from God” when you seek His direction in all things.

And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called into one body, rule your hearts. And be thankful. **Colossians 3:15**

Happy are the Persecuted (vs.10-12)

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of Me. Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you. **Matthew 5:10**

So, if Believers are doing all that they can to bring peace to the world, why is it that they will be despised for their efforts? Answer: before there can be peace with God, there has to be an acknowledgment of sin and subsequent repentance. Remember the first beatitude? **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.”** In order to be reconciled to God, the brokenness over one’s sin must come first. If you do not accept the fact that you are sinner, then you will never recognize your need of a Savior! And therein lies the problem with the world... people do not like hearing the truth about their sin. And therefore, when confronted about the subject by one of God’s “peacemakers”, they become angry and resentful.

There is a movement in the modern day church these days to try and be less offensive when it comes to sin. The thought behind this movement is that if we do not offend people, more of them will come to the church and feel accepted. There is only one problem with this line of thinking, masses of people may well indeed feel welcome in this “church light” version of theology, but without dealing with their sin problem, they will just be lost *and* religious! The truth may be offensive, but it is only the truth that will set people free! God never intended for the church to be a comfortable place from which people could go to hell. He intended it to be a place of healing, restoration, and reconciliation.

Imagine if you went to the doctor and he discovered that you had a cancer. But he didn’t wish to alarm you so instead he told you that everything would be just fine. You would go home feeling great about your health and wellbeing, that is until the cancer had consumed you, and you found out that it was too late for any significant treatment. I imagine there would be no small amount of hostility in your mind for a doctor who would do such a thing. The Church is no different. We must be honest, when it comes to dealing with sin, **for the wages of sin... is death (Romans 6:23).**

Remember this; If all we were supposed to be was kind, and accepting of every wicked thing, no one would ever persecute us. In fact, if Jesus never said anything negative or called out wickedness for what it is, no one would have ever wanted Him crucified. And another thing, if sin is actually no big deal, then the cross was a colossal waste of time! But the truth is, God despises our sin. And as long as we reject His offer of forgiveness and remain consumed with our inherent disease of self-love, we are, and shall forever be, the enemies of God. And when we speak the truth about God’s rejection of our evil ways and urge others to repent and turn to Him for forgiveness, there will always be some that are offended. But we must love them enough to speak the truth, no matter how many will despise us for it. Remember what Jesus had to say about this:

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now they have no excuse for their sin. **John 15:22**

So, blessed are the peacemakers, who are persecuted for trying to reconcile men to God, for they are doing just as Christ has commanded. And it is far better to obey God than to please men (**Acts 5:29**). Jesus warned that we would be slandered and reviled, just as He was slandered and reviled. And we should count it a privilege when we are despised for the cause of Christ. Many in the church might well say, "But I have never really been persecuted for my faith." And I would ask them this question today, "How vocal are you about your faith?" Because if you go around as a "chameleon" disguising your Christianity and trying to "blend in", then no, you probably haven't been persecuted. It is those who boldly proclaim the Name of Christ and stand for His Word, that will be despised. You cannot be a secret agent of the faith. We are called to take a stand. Always keeping in mind:

For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, The Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory and that of The Father and the holy angels.

Luke 9:26

It is far better to please God, than men.

So Christ has commanded us to be peacemakers, giving our all to reconcile lost sinners to the One Who died to save them. And He warns us that when we do so, we will be despised for it. But to love the sinner is to warn him or her about the coming judgment. I would rather someone despise me for truthfully trying to help them, than to accuse me of not caring enough to warn them on their day of judgment! That would be a far worse thing to bear, knowing that I could have helped someone escape death, but I was afraid they wouldn't like me, so instead I kept silent. Perhaps we need a reminder of what lies ahead for those who refuse God's offer of mercy.

The Great White Throne Judgment

Then I saw a great white throne and One seated on it. Earth and heaven fled from His presence, and no place was found for them. I also saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged according to their works by what was written in the books. Then the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them; each one was judged according to their works. Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. **Revelation 20:11-15**

Blessed are those who seek to reconcile others to God and to spare them this fate. Many will hate us for giving them this warning, but we are the sons and daughters of God, and how could we not share with others the same grace and mercy that we have received. Blessed are the persecuted, for they have been obedient to the commands of The LORD, just as the prophets of old and even our LORD Himself. It is far nobler thing to be despised while pleasing God, than to be praised and popular in the eyes of this fallen world.

TRUTH!!