

Matthew 5:9
The Portrait of a Peacemaker

When I take Adalee to school she often asks me to play a song for her. We play all sorts of songs but the other day I thought of a song that I hadn't heard in a while - *We Didn't Start the Fire*. How many of you know every word? Never underestimate the power of a song. Songwriters and artists today are the cultural philosophers. You want to know what our society values just listen to the music. The best songs are those that are born out of conflict. Billy Joel's *We Didn't Start the Fire*, like many other songs, tell the story of a world that is desperate for peace, a world that, since the early stages of its creation, has never experienced any lasting peace. The Bible begins with peace but quickly tells a story of conflict. Early on we see the Devil causing a division between God and his creation, causing division between husband and wife, a war between brothers as one rises against the other and for the first time, human blood is spilt on the earth at the hands of another human being.

Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned (Romans 5:12). Billy Joel was almost right, we didn't start the fire that has always been burning since the world's been turning, and we just kept it going and have added the fuel to the flame.

Is there a solution? Is there any hope for this world? On the authority of the Word of God I can definitively stand before you today and say with all absolutism - Yes! The solution to end the conflict that the world faces came to us one night as the shepherds watched their fields by night and angels lit up the sky with singing. Do you remember the message that the angels had for the shepherds? Luke 2:9-14

And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" (ESV)

This was not simply a declaration of peace, this declaration would be followed by a demonstration where this Jesus who was Lord at his birth would grow to one day secure peace for the world by ending every hostility through the blood of his own cross as he bled for the sins of every man. Christ's entire ministry was a ministry of peace, a ministry of reconciliation, a ministry of restoring a fellowship that was lost between God and man. His whole ministry we see him loving, healing, forgiving, we see him restoring peace to the world; and the ministry of Christ continues and will be completed when he returns.

Today we get to consider our place in his ministry of peace as we hear a word from the Prince of Peace in the 7th Beatitude of Matthew 5.

READ TEXT

Today I wan to give you three truths that will help paint a picture of the peacemakers that Christ has called us to be. So what does a peacemaker look like?

1. A Person Who Knows the Conflict the World Faces

Notice that the text did not say blessed are the peacekeepers. Listen to me carefully, until Christ's return we are at war. Our conflict is not against flesh and blood. Our conflict is against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12) Thankfully these powers have been disarmed and triumphed over, as well as they have been put to open shame as Jesus triumphed over them in the cross (Colossians 2:15).

We fight these forces every day. Not only externally but also internally. Romans 7 tells a story of the Christian wrestling with these powers. Listen to the language: *So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.* (Romans 7:21-23, ESV)

We who are Christians, we who know the conflict that the world faces, know better than declare peace when there is no peace.

In Newnan, on the road that my Mom grew up on, there was a steep hill in the middle of her neighborhood. This hill became known as "Thrill Hill". You can probably guess why it took such a name. This hill is so steep that if you go too fast in a car you can get airborne. When I was growing up there were scars in the road where cars had left the road and come back down with such force that it left gashes in the road. Some of those gashes belong to my Daddy, but that is a different story for a different time. The city put a caution light at the top of the hill, but people kept ignoring the light. Eventually the city put up a stop sign. The authorities went to great lengths to warn the unsuspecting cars of the danger ahead. The city doesn't just want a few cars to wreck, they want none to wreck. Could you imagine if the city just ignored the danger instead of putting up a light and eventually a stop sign? In the same way, we aren't seeing appeasement, we are seeking peace. Appeasement is me saying I want a mustang and someone letting me drive theirs. Peace is me getting my own mustang. Do you see the difference? There is real danger in the world, but the truth of God is there is an even greater peace.

The world believes that all roads lead to God. Jesus says some roads may imitate a thrill but will leave you plummeting off a cliff to your destruction. The world believes that what they attempt will bring peace to the world. Jesus is bringing peace to the world, a peace that he gave his own life to secure.

We have to know the conflict the world faces before we can offer a solution. I think too often we are quick to jump to ethics without first considering theology. Here is what I mean. We too often focus on what we should be doing instead of asking why we are doing what we are doing. Doing the right thing is more important than doing something just to be doing something. I hear this all the time in the way that people in church talk. Come and hear relevant messages, we tell the

world. I have often wondered what comes to people's minds when they hear such marketing for churches. Hopefully what comes to their mind is the most relevant message a church can offer culture - salvation and hope in Christ alone. We believe in the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of souls. People may need clothes and food, and we will give it to them as we are able. But what good is a hot meal and warm clothes if they lose their souls in eternal hell?

I heard a story once of a church calling a business meeting to spend money on a new chandelier. There was a big discussion before the meeting, which is what happens anytime you talk about spending money. So everyone was at the meeting and the motion was brought forward. "Can I have a second?" "Second." "Is there any discussion?" At this point a member of the church said, "I would like to speak." The gentlemen said, "Sir I don't see any reason for us to get a chandelier. I don't know many people who can even spell chandelier let alone play one." Instead of talking about buying a chandelier let's talk tonight about the lights that we need in the church." This gentlemen had a problem - he was concerned about doing over being. Before we do we best make sure that what we are doing is what we need to be doing. This is where theology comes in.

Think with me. Is there one way for us to deal with every problem in the world? The problem in the world is not sex trafficking, not hunger, or poverty. All of those things, as horrible as they are, are devastating results of one major problem. Can we do anything to bring peace in every situation no matter the situation? Yes! Preach reconciliation. Preach Christ the salvation and satisfaction of every soul. Every person on the planet, every prisoner in the prisons, anyone facing a problem, needs one thing - reconciliation with God.

We seek the redemption of mankind by proclaiming the gospel of peace. That brings up a question. If every man needs peace, and our job is to preach peace, then how far do we go to proclaim peace? To the ends of the earth. How do we proclaim peace? As we go! As we go to feed the hungry, we tell them of bread that always satisfies. As we see the lonely, we tell them that there is a Savior that will never leave nor forsake. When we see someone who feels unloved, we tell them of the limitless love of a Savior. Everyone needs peace, and Christ both come to be peace and has called us to be peacemakers.

The second portrait of a peacemaker this AM is

2. A Person Who Is At Peace

The family was gathered at a hospital bed of their grandmother, they knew that time would be short. The preacher was called in and he asked the lady, "Ma'am, have you made your peace with God?" The lady hesitated before she answered, and then she smiled and said to everyone surprise, "No." And just before her family lost all hope, she said, "He has made his peace with me." That lady had good theology. God made his peace with us, finally and for all time, when the Son was sent to seek and save the lost ones. Christ has secured our peace by the blood of his own cross.

Listen to me, the only way for us to be peacemakers is for us to first receive the peace that God has given us in Christ Jesus. Look at the beatitudes. Who are the peacemakers? The peacemakers are those who are meek, those who are freed from self. Peacemakers are those who see the world through the lens of the cross. Peacemakers are those who are free from self-

interest and concern. Peacemakers are consumed with the ethics of the cross. What are the ethics of the cross? Here is what I mean. Peacemakers,

*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.
(Philippians 2:3-8, ESV)*

And what came as a result of Christ's obedience, do you remember? God has highly exalted him and bestowed upon him a name that is greater than any name. What is that name? The rest of the verse tells us, at the name of Jesus, every tongue confess that he is Lord. Look at the beatitude in verse 9. What are the peacemakers called? Sons of God.

You see, number three this AM. A peacemaker

3. A Person Who Pursues Peace

Just as the Son has come to us, pursuing us, bringing peace to us, he commands us to go just as he came. He says in John, *Peace be with you. As the Father send me, so send me you.* (20:21) He came as the Prince of Peace to make peacemakers.

A peacemakers is not content with the status quo. A peacemaker is not seeking trouble, but in the midst of trouble is going to do what it takes to pursue peace, even if the pursuit of peace brings conflict. Ronald Reagan was right, "Peace is not the absence of conflict, it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means." There is no greater way to handle a conflict than to preach Jesus as the salvation of souls, even if that message conflicts with every other message!

Pursuing peace doesn't mean we are seeking appeasement. Peacemakers are not easy going people, they are people troubled by the lack of peace, and in every situation they seek to make peace, even if making peace costs them their own lives!

A peacemaker is easy to spot. A peacemakers is one who doesn't say much, but when he or she speaks people listen. This is the opposite of those who just run their mouth at anything and everything. I was in a church one time and an individual came up to me, said some nasty things, and then said, "Well at least I didn't say it behind your back." To which I responded, "No you didn't but that isn't the problem. The problem is that you said it. Some things you just shouldn't say behind a back or in front of a face." James was right when he said that the tongue was the smallest way to set a whole forest ablaze. I know some of who could do well to practice this on their social media practices. We need more peacemakers on facebook and twitter. Instead of those so self interested.

A peacemaker usually goes out of their way to think of others first. Being a peacemaker doesn't mean idleness. Remember what Jesus said, *"If your enemy is hungry, thirsty, naked... Go out of your way to meet the needs of others. And if someone is not at peace with you then you go to*

them and live at peace as much as you are able. Peacemakers take the initiative because God has taken the initiative with them.

Come to think of it, a true peacemakers is one of the most approachable persons there is. Jesus was a friend of sinners. Why? Because he came seeking and saving lost ones. Jesus came with an olive branch not an arrow. I wonder if the same can be said of me, of you. Can people approach you?

Listen to me. Are you convinced this morning that the world's problem is a sin problem? Are you convinced that no amount of sinning is greater than the salvation that God offers? Have you received the peace of God through Christ Jesus? Are you pursuing peace with the world? Here the Word of the Lord. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Called speaks of ownership. If your motivation is not the peace of the world then you have to evaluate whether you have the right to be called sons of God.

This world needs peace. Only Jesus can give peace to the world. Our job is to tell the world the battle is over, no more fighting, no more war, no need for striving against God, God has given us peace by giving us His Son.

Lord make us peacemakers!