

## **The Be-Attitudes: 7. Peacemakers**

Matthew 5.1-12 [Contemporary English Version]

Mason United Methodist Church

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What does peace feel like? What does real peace look like?

If Jesus said, *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God*, how does that peace come about?

Church of Scotland minister and prolific theologian, William Barclay, says, “We must begin our study of this beatitude by investigating certain matters of meaning in it.” [Barclay, William. *The Daily Study Bible. Volume 1: The Gospel of Matthew*. Edinburgh, Scotland: The Saint Andrew Press, 1956. Page 103]

First, there is the word *peace*. In Greek the word is *eirēné* [eye-reen'-ay], and in Hebrew it is *shalōm* [shah-loam']. In Hebrew peace is never only a negative state; it never means only the absence of trouble; in Hebrew peace always means *everything which makes for a [person's] highest good*. In the east when one [person] says to another, *Salaam* [saw-lahm'] – which is the same word – [it] does not mean that [person] wishes for the other [person] only the absence of evil things; [that person] wishes for [the other person] the presence of all good things. In the Bible peace means not only freedom from all trouble; it means enjoyment of all good. [Ibid]

Second, it must be carefully noted what the beatitude is saying. The blessing is on the peace-*makers*, not necessarily on the peace-*lovers*. It very often happens that if a [person] loves peace in the wrong way, [that person] succeeds in making trouble and not peace. We may, for instance, allow a threatening and dangerous situation to develop, and our [defense] is that for peace's sake we do not want to take any action. There is many a person who thinks that [they] are loving peace, when in fact [they are] piling up trouble for the future, because [they refuse] to face the situation and to take the action which the situation demands. The peace which the Bible calls blessed does not come from the evasion of issues; it comes from facing them, dealing with them, and conquering them. What this beatitude demands is not the passive acceptance of things because we are afraid of the trouble of doing anything about them, but the active facing of things, and the *making* of peace, even when the way to peace is through struggle. [Ibid, page 104]

It has been suggested that, since *shalom* means everything which makes for a [person's] highest good, this beatitude means: Blessed are those who make this world a better place for all [people] to live in. Abraham Lincoln once said, “Die when I may, I would like it to be said of me, that I always pulled up a weed and planted a flower where I thought a flower would grow.” This then would be the beatitude of those who have lifted the world a little further on. [Ibid, page 105]

The Bible says through the prophet Isaiah [26.3], “The person who trusts in God will be kept in perfect peace, because he trusts in God.”

Perfect peace. It sounds so very inviting. So, where does it begin?

Peace must begin within a person’s own self. If we do not have peace within, we cannot very well have peace with other people, other groups, or the world about us. If perfect peace comes from trusting in God – in every situation – that is a starting point.

Jesus said to his disciples (and to us through his words recorded in John 14.27), “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; and that peace is *not the kind of peace the world offers*. Therefore, let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

The peace the *world* offers is tenuous at best. Given our track record of peace in the world’s history, we haven’t done very well. A scan of the daily newspapers and listening to news broadcasts will verify that even now the world is engaged in multiple conflicts in so many areas they can hardly be numbered. Even as we gather for worship the United States is engaged in wars on two fronts, and there are strained relations between nations in many other parts of the globe. The world, huge as it may seem, is but one tiny part of a vast universe in God’s creation. Yet on its surface, people and nations cannot get along with one another. Ironically, delivery of this beatitude sermon falls, quite unplanned by me, on Memorial Day weekend.

So then, contemplating peace within ourselves seems to be a small matter when considered with all else that is in turmoil about us. Yet it is the state of our own minds that can determine whether we are at peace within the larger matrix of the world’s scenarios.

There can be many reasons, even defenses, of why we are not at peace within ourselves.

Blaming others for our own lack of peace is a way of avoiding our own shortcomings and mistakes – not facing the truth about ourselves. Dr. Wayne Dyer says, “All blame is a waste of time. Regardless of how much fault you find, it will not change you. The only thing blame does is keep the focus off you when you’re looking for external reasons to explain your unhappiness or frustration. You may succeed in making another feel guilty but you won’t succeed in changing whatever’s making you unhappy.”

The Israelites spent forty years wandering through the desert to get to a place that could have taken a lot less time. Deuteronomy 1.2 reads, “It is *eleven days* journey from Horeb by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh Barnea [Italics mine].” Yet the people in the group blamed everyone and everything possible for their plight: God, Moses, the environment and their lack of provisions. Their expectations for leadership and provisions were high as they left bondage in Egypt; but, their expectations were down-payments on resentments and blame. They began to cast the toxic dysfunction of their own frustrations onto anything and anyone possible.

Speaking of frustrations – and a certain lack of peace – let me pause in real time here for a real time experience as this manuscript on *peace* was being constructed.

My sermon manuscript was moving along so well that I decided to take my daughters for a road trip, ending up (of course) at the mall. [That fact in itself should speak to a certain level of unusual activity for a dad waiting *peacefully* outside dressing rooms.] Then when we returned home, we launched into calling the Dell Computer Company for advice on how to get Emma's computer running (since it had stalled with the message *hard drive not found*) a small device that has myriads of her favorite pictures and music loaded on it.

Having purchased a two-year warranty from the McChord Base Exchange, I tried to call them for repair advice. I was told that the computer was still on warranty through Dell – so I called *them*. When I reached Dell I was advised that I should purchase a 5-year warranty to cover parts and labor – an amount that was one-third of the purchase amount of the three month-old laptop. I told them I already had purchased a two-year warranty. Eventually I had both the company that issued the two-year warranty on one phone while talking to the Dell representative on another. The confusion was fascinating – especially since neither one was allowed to talk to the other. And a hard-of-hearing Dad was trying to understand the technician whose English was not easy for me to hear and understand.

The good news is that the new computer *is* in fact still under Dell warranty without spending the bucks to purchase an extended one – and the Base Exchange warranty will still be good for another year after Dell's expires. So...

The Dell company technician had Emma taking her computer apart with screwdrivers from Dad's shop. She performed the electronic surgery expertly and had the hard drive in her hand when I went back down into the girls' room. After reinstalling it without connection success, the technician finally said that a new hard drive would be sent to the house at no charge. Problem: all of Emma's stored music and treasured photos.

As I returned to this manuscript I realized just how easy it is to get into a superb scenario of frustration and lack of peace. Big breaths, a few screwdrivers, and a minimum of two cell phone calls later we now wait for the new hard drive and hope for a miracle in retrieving the data from the old one.

I suppose one of the messages I could give you regarding *peace* is this: to increase your experimentation with finding peace within – buy yourself a computer!

Back to the scripture: there is another meaning for the word *peace*. Barclay says that it is a meaning on which the Rabbis loved to dwell, and it is almost certainly the meaning which Jesus had in his mind. The Rabbis held that the highest task which a [person] can perform is to establish right relationship between [themselves and other persons]. That is what Jesus means. [Ibid]

Barclay continues...

There are people who are always storm centres of trouble and bitterness and strife. Wherever they are they are either involved in quarrels themselves or the cause of quarrels between others. They are trouble-makers. There are people like that in almost every society and every Church, and such people are doing the devil's own work. On the other hand – thank God – there are people in whose presence bitterness cannot live, people who bridge the gulfs, and heal the breaches, and sweeten the bitteresses. Such people are doing a godlike work, for it is the great purpose of God to bring peace between [people] and Himself [*sic*], and between [person] and [person]. The [person] who divides [other persons] is doing the devil's work; the [person] who unites [people] is doing a [*sic*] God's work. [Ibid]

I close with the thought that the Enemy (also referred to as Satan) will never stop trying to involve people in the blame game. Romans 12.21 reads, "Do not let yourself be overcome by evil; but overcome evil with good."

My brother-in-love who is a United Methodist pastor in Tennessee wrote on this subject, "You get to decide how much ground you will give The Accuser: The Enemy (Satan) who will go to great lengths to test us." And he refers to Revelation 2.10 which reads, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."

Hebrews 12.14-15 encourages us to "pursue peace with all people, and to pursue holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness spring up and cause trouble..."

When we find peace *within ourselves* we can move on toward peace with other people, with other groups (church, organizations and clubs), and ultimately with the world that surrounds us.

We are not *perfect*; but, thanks be to God, we can be the *forgiven*!

Blessed are those who work to produce right relationships and peace between people, for they are doing the work of God!

Amen.