

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

We are blessed this morning as we openly gather to worship God together without any opposition or hindrance. This is not the case for many Christian churches in numerous countries throughout the world, where it is illegal to publically live out and practice their faith in Jesus Christ. But Jesus told us it would be so - *“In this world you will have tribulation,”* he said (John 6:33). But the *“tribulation”* Jesus spoke of is more than just the struggle of living out our faith in Jesus Christ. He also declared that our world was, and is and always be a constant hotbed of continual struggle, war and conflict. In Matthew 24:6 he said, *“You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet.”* The Society of International Law states that during the last 4,000 years of recorded history there have been only 286 years of peace, and in spite of that fact, in excess of 8000 peace treaties were also made during that time —and almost of those treaties have been broken.

The truth is, war is a constant reality of life. Conflict is all around us, whether it be on global scale or in our personal relationships in life. At least one source I read said that there are at least 33 ongoing conflicts in the world today. In spite of mankind’s intellectual accomplishments, we only seem to devise more efficient means of killing each other. Islamic terrorist’s attacks have convinced us that we are not safe even within our own borders. Countries all around the world are politically, socially, economically, religiously and racially divided. We see conflict in the culture our day in that the aggressive promotion of personal rights and self-oriented entitlements and individual opinions has created the opportunity for division and conflict to infect every layer of every relationship that we know in this world.

The norm of our day is reflected in the classic conversation years ago between Lady Astor and Winston Churchill, when Lady Astor said: “If you were my husband, I’d put poison in your coffee.” To which Winston Churchill responded: “Well, if you were my wife, I’d drink it.” We may laugh at this sarcasm, but on a deeper level it reveals that all of us are, to varying degrees, predisposed to conflict. And we know this is true as we can trace our inclination for war back to the book of Genesis. Humanity has been at war with God ever since Adam and Eve rebelled against God. That first sin was then the causation of the conflict between Cain and Abel, which eventually led to one brother killing the other - and ever since then the war has continued, unabated. A few years ago group of people from a couple of churches walked across America on a mission of peace. They finished, but not together, because half-way across the continent, they divided into two groups because they couldn’t get along – supporting the remark that, “Where two or three come together in Jesus’ name...there will eventually be conflict.”

In the midst of all of this continuous war and incessant conflict, Jesus proclaims: *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God”* (Matthew 5:9). This is the seventh of eight Beatitudes spoken by Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount. This beatitude reveals the next step we take when entering the Kingdom of God, the place in our lives where God reigns as king in our hearts. Jesus tells us here that when we are keenly aware of the depth of our sin, and truly grieving over our sin and completely surrendered to God, and hungry and thirsty for the righteousness of God, and overwhelmed by the mercy of God, and seeking purity of heart with God – we will be compelled to make peace with God, which will cause us to make peace with others. And in doing so, we will *“be called sons of God.”*

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” The Bible is a book of peace as the word *“peace”* appears over 400 times in Scriptures, with many other indirect references. Hebrews 13:20 refers to God as the *“God of peace”* - and because this is part of His very character, He wants His people to be marked by peace as well. Isaiah 9:6 describes Jesus as the *“Prince of peace.”* In this sense we can see that biblical concept of *“peace”* is much deeper than just the absence of conflict and war.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” The Greek word here for “peace” is grounded in the Hebrew word “shalom” - a word which many of you may have heard before. The word “shalom” means much more than our understanding of peace. “Shalom” means “a physical, emotional, and spiritual completeness and wholeness, a contentment and tranquility of spirit, a total settled-ness within the heart, mind and soul.” In the busy, hectic world we live in today, “shalom” evades us. Much of what happens in our lives seems to be more a matter of just hanging on or surviving another day, getting through another day full of activities and busyness. “Shalom” only becomes a reality for each one of us when we totally and unconditionally surrender our hearts, minds, wills, and souls into the lap of God. Shalom peace is a physical, emotional, and spiritual peace, a complete and whole peace of the heart, mind and soul that only comes from immersing oneself in an intimate love relationship with God.

In Romans 5:1 says: *“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* We experience the fullness of shalom peace when we surrender our hearts to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In John 14:27, Jesus said: *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”* The peace of God is not something we can manufacture, buy or earn. The only way we can have the peace of God - is to have peace with God. Peace with God is a result of a heart that is totally surrendered to God through Jesus. It is then that we can truly know His inner peace in our daily walk with him: *“the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:7).

Here we see that biblical “peace” is not so much about the absence of conflict as it is about the presence of God. In the Old Testament, the peace of shalom was intended to resonate in all relationships. When used as a greeting, shalom was a wish for outward freedom from disturbance that comes from an inward sense of well-being. To a people constantly harassed by enemies, peace was the premiere blessing. In Numbers 6:24-26, God gave Moses these words to use when blessing His people: *“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”* We see the preciousness and priority of shalom peace in that every one of Paul’s thirteen letters begins with a greeting of peace and some of them end with it as well.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” The compound words in the original language that make up the English word “peacemaker” had a well understood meaning among the rabbis of Jesus’ day. The Jewish rabbis at that time held that the greatest and highest and noblest task in life was that of a “peacemaker.” What peacemakers did, in all that they did - with total heart, mind, soul, and strength - was work to establish *right relationships* - right relationships between God and men/women, and right relationships between one another as human beings created in the image of God.

And peacemakers also knew that the source of the peace that would bring about right relationships was God Himself. We see that in God’s blessing: *“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”*

The source of shalom peace in the right relationships with God and in right relationships with one another - is Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 2:14-18 the apostle Paul tell us that Jesus, *“is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.”* What Paul saying is that we when come to faith in Jesus, we will experience God’s peace because we’ve ceased in our war of sin against God. And as a result, we are then compelled to help make peace between God and each other, and others who are also at war with God.

Peace with God gives us inner peace, resulting in making peace with others. Romans 12:18: *“If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”* James 3:13-18: *“Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”* Peacemakers make peace because they have found peace with God.

Jesus speaks of this peacemaking also in Matthew 5:43-48: *“You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* Jesus tells us that peacemakers lovingly pray for those who oppose and persecute them. What should peacemakers lovingly pray for? They should pray that their enemies would find peace with God through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus also tells us that peacemakers greet their enemies. How should peacemakers greet their enemies? They should greet their enemies like they would our most intimate “brother” or sister in Christ, so that they could have peace with them.

Jesus is telling us in these verses that when there is a rupture in one of our relationships, or if someone treats us like an enemy and opposes us, we must not nurse that grudge. He is telling us that we should *not do* what we naturally would do in the flesh – which would be feed the animosity we feel against that person by ignoring and avoiding them. That is not the impulse of the Spirit of a peacemaking God, who sacrificed his Son to reconcile us to himself and to each other. Peacemakers try to build bridges to others. They do not want animosity to remain. They want reconciliation. Peacemakers have a longing for peace in their hearts. Peacemakers reject the phony gloss of politeness that covers anger; they don’t allow themselves to be offended; they refuse to drink from the poison cup of bitterness and anger and grumbling and complaining. As former enemies of God, peacemakers make peace with their enemies.

In Romans 5:1 the apostle Paul writes: *“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Having established peace with God, peacemakers naturally assume the responsibility of actively working to reconcile others to God. Peacemakers make every effort to get out the “good news” of the gospel that God is no longer angry, that peace has been made on the cross and the peace treaty with God has been signed in the blood of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. At the end of War World II, the United States signed a peace treaty with Japan, yet there were hold outs in the South Pacific Islands, who either did not get the word or did not believe the word that war was over and so they continued to fight a world that had officially ended. The last officially confirmed Japanese holdout came out the jungle in the Philippines to surrender in 1974, 29 years after the war had ended. In the same way, many people today are isolated in their own worlds, still fighting against God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” In the context of how the light of the gospel has transformed our hearts, the apostle Paul writes: *“From now on . . . we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”* (2 Corinthians 5:16-21).

Brothers and Sisters - this is our calling! God did not send his only begotten Son to die on a cross in our place for our sins, putting an end to our rebellious war against God - *so that* we could live our lives for ourselves. Rather Jesus lovingly sacrificed his life on a cross *so that* we might experience God's peace in our war of sin against God – and *so we might then* sacrificially live out our lives making peace between God and each other, and making peace between God and all others who are also at war with God. *“Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation . . . entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”* The Greek words translated *“reconciled, reconciling, and reconciliation”* in the English means “to be restored into one’s favor.” We see this concept clearly in Colossians 1:19-22 when the Paul declares that in Christ, *“all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross .And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.”* Peacemakers are those who by God’s grace, have found peace with God and have been reconciled to God – and committed themselves to helping others find peace with God through the ministry and message of reconciliation – which is the good news of the gospel that Jesus Christ died on a cross so that we might be restored back to God.

But before we go any further, before we go any deeper, we need to address how the enemy of our faith in Jesus tries to distract or deceive us when it comes to committing ourselves and living out the reality of *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”* The issue at hand is the difference between a peace-keeper and a peace-maker. A peacekeeper is a person who enforces, by whatever means, by force of personality or by superior weapons, a truce. But a peacemaker is one who seeks to discover the origin of the conflict, and then commits themselves to find a way to resolve the conflict, and helps restore the parties in the conflict in a healthy relationship with each other. *We can be a peace-keeper without being a peace maker - because sometimes conflict must occur in order for us to truly experience genuine peace.* This is often the way of God. *This is what happens when we come to faith in Jesus.*

True salvation begins with an inner conflict that takes place deep within our hearts, which is the struggle, the war, between our flesh and the Spirit of God within us - which only gives way when we surrender our hearts to Jesus, which then allows the peace of God through the power of the Holy Spirit to flow into our hearts. The same is true in all our relationships with one another. Sometimes, in order to have the true peace of God, we must go through the inner conflict deep within our hearts, to the point of painfully once again surrendering our hearts to Jesus, as he lovingly confronts us regarding what struggle, what war, what conflict is going on in our lives between our flesh and the Spirit God within us. Peace-keepers will do whatever it takes to avoid conflict. Peace-makers seek to find the source of conflict, and commit themselves to reconcile and restore those in conflict. Our God is not a peace keeping God. He sent his only Son into the world to destroy our source of conflict and to restore us back to God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” We are not to be peace-keepers who simply seek peace for the sake of peace at any cost. We are to be peace-makers, who share the peace of God that was achieved at the greatest price on the cross of Jesus Christ. In Matthew 10:34 Jesus himself said: *“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”* Jesus then goes on to tell us that his peace will cause war between fallen, sinners who are not completely surrendered and submitted to him: *“Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”* (Matthew 10:38-39). Colossians 1:20 tells us Jesus made peace *“by the blood of his cross.”* Brothers and sisters, as peacemakers, this is our calling also. Dick Naves writes: *“This is not work that can be accomplished in our own strength. Peace can only flourish where there is a deep and lasting change within hearts. The free and undeserved grace that secure our peace with God is the same grace needed to make peace in the hearts of others. Remember this as you agonize over conflict between love ones and God or among members of your church and community. Grace is what is needed. Bathe your peace keeping efforts in prayer. Ask God to honor your imperfect work for the sake of his supremely faithful son.”*

“Rooted firmly in the peace made by Christ, today's peacemakers must look to his life as a model. His peacemaking earned him the hatred of religious leaders in the derision of his family. His peacemaking led him to a garden, not for quiet repose, but for a midnight wrestling; not for cool refreshment, but an overflowing cup of almighty wrath. His peacekeeping lead him to a cross, and it led him to outer darkness. But it also led him to a crown, a throne, and a people from every tribe and tongue and nation. This is the lot of peacekeepers. Their bodies are scarred and they have been despised, but their harvest is full and the title is no cause for shame. They should be called sons of God.”

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” The phrase *“sons of God”* is a bestowed title indicating a special family relationship. The promised blessing of being a *“peacemaker”* is that we will be called, named, recognized, designated as a true son/daughter of God. As children on earth resemble their parents, *we are never more like God than when we are making peace as Jesus made peace.* *“Sons of God”* seek to make peace that is grounded in the cross of Christ. It is the family resemblance of making peace that marks us as sons/daughters of God. Whenever we make peace by bringing people into a relationship with God or by bringing two people together, we look a lot like God.

At 11:40 on April 14, 1912 the Titanic hit an iceberg in the north Atlantic and sunk at 2:30 in the morning on April 15th. Of the 2,223 people on board, 1,517 died in the frigid waters. 18 lifeboats were launched, each one with a capacity of 65 people. Unfortunately most of the lifeboats were not filled to capacity. According to the official commission authorized to investigate the sinking, all but 2 of the of the lifeboats rowed away from the passengers screaming in the water for fear that the ship would pull them down with it. Only 2 of the half-empty lifeboats came back to rescue anyone. In fact, an hour after the ship had sunk, the remaining boats stayed away from the area where people were still drowning.

This was a tragic indifference toward those who were physically perishing. But how much more tragic is it that we who are saved and reconciled and at peace with God - stand idly by and not share the grace of the life-saving, heart-transforming message of reconciliation, the gospel of the God of peace who became one of us and died on the cross to reconcile us to Himself, with those who are spiritually drowning in the sea of conflict, struggle and war of sin and death that fills the lives and covers the that world we live in.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” We are never more like God than when we are making peace as Jesus made peace. But making peace like Jesus, means that we might be stepping into the midst of conflict, struggle and war. But God rarely calls us to serve him in our comfort zone. But Jesus said: *“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation.”* And then he said, *“But take heart; I have overcome the world”* (John 6:33). May we be peacemakers who share the blessing of reconciliation with God, through the crucified and risen Christ. In Christ the war against God and one another is over. Jesus is our peace, let us share him with others!

I rest beneath the Almighty's shade,
My griefs expire, my troubles cease;
Thou, Lord, on whom my soul is stayed,
Wilt keep me still in perfect peace. Charles Wesley

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