

Reading: Matthew 5:9

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God

Sermon:

I want us this morning, because of the day that this is, to focus on verse 9 of Matthew 5 - 'Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God'.

I know you will all agree that the world we live in is so full of division. It is depressing to switch on the News. It frankly makes me wonder whether there will ever be a day where there will be peace on this earth. And yet I know there is hope. The good news of the Gospel is that even with the brokenness we see on the newspapers, even with the many instances of injustice and war, there is a hope that can only be found in Jesus Christ. Jesus would share a sermon that some would call it the very framework of what it is to be a follower of Jesus Christ. It was a sermon that would not so much describe what a Christian was supposed to do, but more importantly what a Christian was to be. That's why it is called the Beatitudes because the ideals that are taught in it are to be internalised and lived out by every follower of Jesus Christ.

And so Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God".

The significance of this message at that time should not be ignored. It was so appropriate, it was so contemporary, because the people were looking on their Jewish history of war and blood, and they were looking on the past 400 years since God spoke to them last, and there had been five wars for the city in which they were in at this moment. Is it any wonder He said: 'Blessed are the peacemakers'?

So what is a peacemaker? Well they are not peacekeepers. They don't just become involved in maintaining peace in a toxic atmosphere; that somehow without them the commotion of unrest and violence will erupt again. Neither did Jesus say, "Blessed are those who yearn, or want, or desire, or whose aspirations are peace". Peacemaking is risky and it requires action. A peacemaker is someone that promotes peace in their life and in the community even at the cost of their own reputation. It's not a maintenance function that occurs when something needs resolved. Instead it is an active process to go, risk and make. Because when we are busy making peace (the shalom that Jesus speaks of) we are emulating him, and we become children of God.

And that theme of peace then flows throughout all aspects of the Jesus' sermon. Jesus will talk about forgiving others, he will talk about loving your enemies, he will talk about how to treat those that do something wrong to you. All he is doing is unpacking what it is to be a peacemaker. Notice that never does Jesus depend upon any of the authorities around him, the government or education, to help with the process of peace. He knows that the only one to teach peace are the people who know the Prince of peace. So if you are looking for peace then begin by knowing him. On a day such as today when we consider those that have sacrificed their lives

for others in the pursuit of peace, we must be mindful that behind that desire for peace has been a government or a structure or a country's will to see peace restored, but for us today if we claim Jesus as our Lord, then we must recognise that we carry His peace within us.

And Jesus blesses us if we are his peacemakers because he is the ultimate peacemaker. That will very much be worked out through his life and particularly as he takes the burden of sin on to the cross. Because for Jesus, he knew that since Genesis 3 there was a great conflict between humanity and God. When sin was created, a gap existed between a holy God and broken humanity. Humanity had come into opposition with God as a result of sin. That's why Romans 3:23 says, 'For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God'. But the grace of God was so incredible that God realised that no one could take on the role of peacemaker other than him through the life and salvation of Jesus Christ. Jesus rose from the despair of death so that you and I could be in peace with God. That's what Paul tells the church in Rome in Romans 5:1 – he says, "Therefore, since we have been justified (just as if I haven't sinned) through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ".

So when we are trying to understand how we can be a peacemaker, we begin by remembering that fact that God has made peace with us through what Jesus has done. And the gap between him and us has been joined. Our midweek Bible studies are looking at Paul's letter to Colossae, and in Chapter 1 verse 21 he says, "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. <sup>22</sup> But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation". So if we recognise the reconciliation that has taken place through Christ for our brokenness, then nothing is impossible for us as we step into a place of making Godly peace with others in our families, in our community, across political divides, wherever it may be.

We've also got to make sure not to misunderstand the definition of peacemaker. A peacemaker is certainly not a pleaser. It doesn't mean that for the easy way out that you just allow the other person to walk right over you, or as I have seen examples of, you just brush things under the carpet just for a happy life. That's not a peacemaker. We can't ignore the issues that damage or destroy us. Injustice and corruption must be addressed. And if we want to see a model therefore of a peacemaker it's the work of Christ. He certainly didn't allow people to walk over him, and neither did he just settle down for the quiet life by not saying anything at all. When he saw issues relating to ritual from the Pharisees it says he rebuked them. When he saw issues of disagreement within his own team of disciples, he rebuked them. When he saw what his Father's house was turning into, he overturned the tables. Therefore we have got to imitate him in how we handle conflict. Yes God must be glorified by the conflict being resolved, but we can't ignore injustice where it is seen. And that means going into uncomfortable environments. In our pursuit for peace we have to be willing to be uncomfortable in order that we honour Christ more.

Alison and I have a good friend whose dad served as an RUC officer. One day while at work he was shot dead by an IRA marksman. Some years later after his conviction, my friend's mother – the bereaved wife of her shot dead husband, would visit the Maze prison being involved in prison ministry, she actively pursued the need to forgive, and on many opportunities had the opportunity to tell prisoners about her own faith in Jesus and how he had brought her to a place of forgiveness. I don't think anyone can be honest today and say that we could do that, but this woman placed herself in an incredibly uncomfortable place in order that Christ would be honoured.

That is not at all easy when it comes to making peace. You see as part of that same sermon on the mount, Jesus taught his followers the Lord's prayer which we all know says to forgive our trespasses, and then straight after this he said these words (in Matthew 6:15), "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup> But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins". So if we are to be peacemakers then we will have to go to places in our hearts that will feel very uncomfortable, but in order to give honour to God we must go there.

On days such as today we very much want to focus on those that have gone before us and those that are here today marked with the scars of war and conflicts as they have sacrificed everything for our peace. But if we all consider that God calls us to **be** peacemakers, then I want to leave us considering our part in it because every day there are opportunities to be carriers of peace, and so what practical steps we can take to make peace. So very briefly here are some steps towards peacemaking.

**Firstly in order to be peacemakers we must get rid of the sin in our own lives first.**

People will more likely listen to us if we are walking right with God than if we're not. Because how on earth can we step in to assist with peace if we are not walking close to the Prince of peace. That will also mean that we need to be honest about our failings and bring them before God as 1 John 1:9 says, 'If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness'. And from that point we can be carriers of peace knowing the peace we have with God.

**Secondly to be a peacemaker we need to have the wisdom from God to know when to speak and when not to.**

Proverbs 17:27 says 'The truly wise person restrains his words, and the one who stays calm is discerning'. We need to always weigh up our words before we say them and the impact that they will have, and whether they will bring peace but more important bring glory to God. A fool will say what ever is in his heart, but it reminds me that when we just say things without thinking it is like trying to put toothpaste back into the tube. We must seek God's wisdom in our search for peace.

### **Thirdly to be a peacemaker we must return good for evil**

Romans 12 says that 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good'. There have been many situations where my response to someone has provoked me to respond with the same as what I've received, and yet that is not what Jesus teaches us to be. We certainly don't bring glory to God through revenge. Pouring God's grace and love into any situation will always bring defeat to Satan.

### **And then finally, as peacemakers we need to develop perseverance**

I think the reason I leave this to the end is because we need to recognise the darkness that drives deep into people and nations in conflict. There is a huge spiritual battle going on for the souls of those involved. The enemy does not want us to resolve our differences so he will keep pressing against any signs of peace. Our prayers and our pursuit for peace may not often immediately produce fruit but we must persevere for the sake of the hope of the gospel. Galatians 6:9 therefore encourages us that 'we must not grow weary in doing good, for in due time we will reap, if we do not give up'.

### **So what are we prepared to sacrifice in order that peace dominates over division?**

It was through great sacrifice that WWI finally came to an end. At that moment there was a peace and a chance that the world could change for the better. Into the darkness of war, a light shone. But what followed was an armistice that actually whilst it came into place on the 11 November 1918 actually took until the 10<sup>th</sup> January 1920 for that peace to be ratified. And even with that tensions would grow once again leading to the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. Therefore the pursuit of peace needs something more than a human will to become everlasting. It requires Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

There has never been a time when there have been no wars or conflict somewhere in the world. But our hope is that that God's light always shines through the darkness, Jesus is risen and has defeated the power of sin.

**My prayer is that this Remembrance Day, those in power will hear afresh the words of Jesus: Blessed be the peacemaker for they will be called children of God.**

That prayer though is not just for those in power but also for us every day of our lives, and in our very nature as followers of Christ. Remember that the Sermon on the Mount was not a set of instructions but more a definition of who we are to be. Therefore in our daily lives do we carry God's peace into all we do? Are we willing to sacrifice what we want in any situation and give God the glory instead? Are we willing to place love before revenge? May we look to Jesus in our pursuit for his peace that brings healing to any and all situations.