

Beatitudes: *Blessed Are the Shalom-Makers* - week 8

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - June 21, 2020

(Drawing from Rev. Darrell Johnson's *Beatitudes: Living in Sync with the Reign of God*)

We're continuing our series on the Beatitudes drawing from the book by Rev. Darrell Johnson, *The Beatitudes: Living in Sync with the Reign of God*. Today's Beatitude is from Matthew 5:9, **"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."**

On Mother's Day we learned about comfort for *"aching visionaries"* who mourn over our broken world and want a better world for their children to live in. Today on Father's Day, we learn of the wonderful dignity of being called children of our Heavenly Father, who gives us peace in our hearts and then the call to "peace-making" in the world.

To us Jesus speaks His seventh Beatitude, **"Right-on, in sync with God's kingdom, are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."** Jesus is here bestowing an incredible dignity on ordinary, imperfect people. *We lucky bums* can have an impact on our world, we are "Makers." Peace-makers. Jesus is not here blessing "peace lovers," although He certainly could. Jesus is not here blessing "peace seekers," although He certainly could. Jesus is not here blessing "peace keepers," although He certainly could and does. Jesus is here congratulating "peace makers." Plain, old, regular, imperfect folk... makers of peace.

Now what's the nature of that peace? For most people, the word "peace" means either inner tranquility or the absence of war in the world. Yet the Biblical concept of peace goes much further and deeper than those. Behind the word used in the seventh Beatitude is the Hebrew word *shalom*. It means "*soundness, well-being, wholeness.*" Shalom is life as God originally intended it to be. Shalom involves harmony with other human beings, harmony with one's inner self, harmony with the earth, and harmony with the Living God. Shalom then encompasses every dimension of life.

When Jesus and His good news get a hold of us, something happens. Ordinary, broken people become partners in a Divine work. We become shalom makers. We are given that incredible dignity. Again, this is not simply making the absence of war. This is making the kind of well-being that prevents war from even happening.

In the Beatitudes, all eight of them, Jesus gives eight qualities of kingdom people. This means every person captivated by Jesus and His gospel, every kingdom-ized, born again, Spirit-filled person - use whatever term you want - every follower of Jesus is to be a shalom-maker. Not just a shalom lover, seeker, or keeper, but shalom-maker! Peacemaking is a sign of the Kingdom come.

Why is this, why is peacemaking a mark of those who have turned around and embraced Jesus and His good news of the kingdom? For two basic reasons.

First, Jesus who gives the good news is the Man of Peace. He is Shalom Himself. Isaiah 9, the great Christmas Eve text says, **“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us... and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace”** (Isaiah 9:6).

Jesus is the Prince of Peace, who speaks shalom into being. Having received Him, we cannot but become, at the very least, shalom lovers and shalom seekers.

Second, peacemaking is a mark of those upon whom the kingdom has come because the kingdom is a kingdom of Peace. In Jesus’ actions, we see shalom-in-the-making: restoration of harmony with the Living God, restoration of harmony with others, restoration of harmony with self, and restoration of harmony with the earth. Embracing His shalom for us, we cannot help but become, at the very least, shalom lovers and shalom seekers. And even more, Jesus says we become shalom makers.

Well then, what does this peacemaking look like? What does it look like in the part of the world where you live? Jesus speaks of this in His Sermon on the Mount, which follows the Beatitudes.

And although we do not know everything about the shalom-making vocation Jesus calls us to, we do know some things.

First, we know the proper stance for receiving and experiencing peace. Shalom is a gift of God, a gift that can only be enjoyed in relationship with God. Truly only the love of God in Jesus can melt resistant hearts, so peacemaking begins by letting everyone know it is safe to come out of hiding, our Heavenly Father is coming to us with outstretched arms like the Prodigal's Father in Luke 15, because He loves us.

Shalom is a gift of God given to those who let God be God. We have to start there. That is the posture, the stance from which we make peace. I am a child of God, you are a child of God. Shalom begins in our hearts with that knowledge, then works its way out in our shalom making.

Second, we know the qualifications of a shalom-maker.

The qualifications are the first six Beatitudes. In them the Prince of Peace is describing the people who have what it takes to be engaged in this Divine enterprise. And what a surprise!

1. Peacemakers are "poor in spirit." They recognize and admit their spiritual bankruptcy. They recognize and admit the lack of peace in their hearts. They recognize and admit the violence in their own hearts. *We lucky bums* who don't have it all together in the things of God are called to be shalom makers.

2. Peacemakers are “those who mourn.” They grieve over the sinful condition of the world and of their own hearts. They weep the tears of God Himself, who grieves over our hurting world.

3. Peacemakers are also “meek” - not weak, but gentle. They can resist temptation to take vengeance into their own hands, for they have thrown themselves on the King of kings and wait for Him to vindicate them.

4. Peacemakers also “hunger and thirst for righteousness,” for right-relatedness. Their appetites have changed. They long to see God’s right-relatedness realized in all their relationships. They recognize that we live in one world, and they seek the good of the whole world, not just the good of their own empires. They treat other human beings with respect, with dignity, and not just as pawns in a grand chess game.

5. Peacemakers are “merciful.” They do not need to give to others what others might rightly deserve; they give to others what they do not deserve: pardon and kindness. They are willing to put themselves in another person’s, another culture’s, and another nation’s shoes. Peacemakers are merciful.

6. And peacemakers are “pure in heart.” They do not like deceit, hypocrisy, and manipulation. They can spot it in their own hearts and want it out. They want to see all of life in light of God’s truth and grace. They recognize their

own lust for power, their desire to control, and can distinguish it from the will of God. They simply seek the Face of Jesus.

According to the Prince of Peace, it is “Beatitude People” who are agents of shalom. They are the ones who make peace in the world.

Third, we know what can happen to shalom-makers: they receive the approval and blessing of God. They sometimes receive the approval and blessing of people. And sometimes they receive people’s scorn and opposition.

If the first six Beatitudes describe the qualifications of peacemaking, the eighth Beatitude describes the consequence: **“Blessed are those who are persecuted.”** Shalom-makers often meet opposition and sometimes get hurt (which we will look at more with the next Beatitude.)

Fourth, we know that shalom-making involves sacrifice.

Somewhere along the way, we have to come to terms with the fact that the cross is not only the source of our new life in Jesus, but is also the pattern of our new life in Jesus. The Prince of Peace who is our peace says to us, **“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me”** (Luke 9:23). Shalom is made and experienced through the cross. So much that Dietrich Bonhoeffer concluded that the disciples of Jesus make

peace “*by choosing to endure suffering themselves rather than inflict it on others.*”

Now as much as this may make us afraid, this also brings us shalom. It's us *lucky bums* who have Jesus' shalom come upon us who can desire peacemaking as a pattern of our lives.

But how? There is so much trouble in our world. How do we make shalom-making a pattern of our lives?

Well, we know one more thing about this: Peacemaking happens one step at a time. It happens by you and me making shalom in little ways in our corners of our world. It matters that we do this. As the song goes, “*Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.*” Or, as Paul encourages believers, “**If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men [people]**” (Romans 12:18).

Here then are five little steps of peacemaking we might make today.

- We begin by affirming our identity and vocation in Jesus. We can say, “I am a peacemaker.” By grace, we are children of God, sons and daughters of the Author of shalom, sisters and brothers of the Prince of Peace. By grace, we have been granted the dignity of partnering in the Divine work of peacemaking.
- We can then acknowledge any resistance to God in our hearts. We can ask God to melt that resistance so we

will know our Father's kindness and love in our hearts. We start with that love, and then we can share it with others.

- We can further acknowledge any anger in our hearts: anger against others, anger against self, and anger against God. We can ask God to heal the anger in our souls.
- We can further acknowledge any fear in our hearts. Fear holds us back from our great vocation and seems to be the currency of those who try to influence the world. Acknowledge any fear you have, and ask Jesus to overcome it.
- And then we can affirm the gospel again. We can say a fresh "amen" to God's good news. We can say with Jesus, **"It is time. It is time for the kingdom of God to come near."** Reaffirming the gospel revives our kingdom hope. There is always hope!

The kingdom has come and is coming. No one and nothing can finally stand in the way of God's kingdom.

Shalom is coming - Jesus' resurrection guarantees that. Jesus' resurrection proclaims loud and clear that shalom will come. For the Prince of Peace has defeated the greatest enemy of Peace; Jesus has defeated death. Shalom is coming.

This Beatitude bestows on us an amazing dignity as children of God, and further, it says we can be part of bringing about one of our greatest desires in life: peace in

our hearts and peace in the world. Included in Jesus' good news is the revelation that we matter to our Heavenly Father and that we "aching visionaries" matter for making peace in our world.

Blessed, right-on, in sync are the shalom-makers, for they shall be called the children of God. What an incredible dignity!

Dear Jesus,

You call us into Your kingdom, help us to be Your Beatitude people. Oh the dignity You bestow on us! Free us from all the fears that get in the way of cooperating with You in Your great work in the world; equip us with all the grace we need to be people of shalom. We want to be known as children of the Peace-Making God in all the places we live and work.

In Jesus Name, Amen.

