

November 14, 2010

# *The Peacemaking Church*

## *Blessed Are the Peacemakers*

### **Matthew 5:1 – 12**

This morning we are embarking on a seven-week series on the Peacemaking Church. Normally we preach expositively, that is we take a text and expound on the topics within the text. But we are taking some time to preach topically for a few weeks, that is, take a topic and expound on the texts in that topic. And the topic we are going to be delving deep into is the matter of peace and peacemaking. And we are not doing this because there we think that Summit Christian has an appalling lack in this area and we need to somehow whip up some feelings for peace. On the contrary, there is a remarkable sense of peace in this place. A great sense of shalom, which is the Hebrew word for peace.

**Shalom** doesn't just mean an absence of strife. The meaning of peace goes far beyond that. When you study the meaning of shalom, you begin to see that it is so much deeper and broader than simply an absence of turmoil or strife. God created the world to be a fabric woven together in interdependency and relationship – just like the thousands of threads that comprise a suit of clothes. For individual threads to become a fabric, each thread must be woven around and under and over and through every other thread – they interpenetrate each other and become intertwined and interdependent. And the more interdependent they become, the more beautiful, the stronger and warmer the fabric becomes. And God created all the various elements of the world to exist in a beautiful, harmonious, interdependent, knitted, webbed relationship to each other.

Your body is a good example of this. When your body is working properly and every part is interdependently harmoniously working together with every other part, you experience health, physical shalom. But if you have cancer, that means that parts of your body are not working with other parts of your body and you experience the unraveling of physical shalom. And when physical shalom unravels completely you die. Psychologically, when your mind and emotions and will are all working together in harmony and interdependency you have peace in your soul. But you experience the unpeace of mental, emotional, and spiritual health when for example your desire for something your conscience says is wrong overrides what is right and you feel guilt and the unraveling of psychological shalom. And the loss of psychological shalom is not just limited to guilt, but anger, and fear and emptiness and a million other symptoms.

The full meaning of shalom, or peace is better understood than as completeness, wholeness, health, welfare, safety, soundness, tranquility, prosperity, perfectness, fullness, rest, harmony, the absence of agitation or discord. **It describes a condition where all the parts of a thing are working together to produce perfect harmony and well-being.** **Sar SHALOM** – Prince of Peace is one of the descriptive names the Bible uses to indicate the ministry and personality of the Messiah - The Son of God who is Himself peace. When I was in Israel this past spring, one word I heard again and again was this word 'Shalom' – 'Peace'. When anyone met or left they always greeted and blessed one another with 'Shalom'. But it was not just an absence of conflict they were intending, it was really a blessing for wholeness, and harmony and completeness they were speaking over one another.

This is important because as **Christians we are called to be peacemakers**. That is, to be those who work hard at unraveling the unraveled, striving to bring harmony out of discord, committed to restoring peace where there is now war. In His discourse in Matthew 5-7, commonly called the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus begins with what we call the Beatitudes: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted, Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied..."* and so on. And many Christians have looked at these various descriptions and concluded that these describe various kinds of people. That is you have the humble Christian, the mournful Christian, the gentle Christian, the Christian that hungers and thirsts for righteousness, and so on. But that is not what Jesus is saying or describing.

These various individual descriptions are together a composite picture of kingdom people. In fact this discourse, from chapter 5 through 7, has been called the Constitution of the Kingdom. And it describes what kind of person is a kingdom person. *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."*

What this says is that if we don't obtain mercy, we will receive judgment. If we don't see God, we cannot be in heaven. If we aren't called the sons of God, we not in the family of God. And so when Jesus talks about blessed are the peacemakers – He is not saying that for those who follow Christ, peacemaking is simply an option, but rather that peacemaking is part of who you are as a Christian. Christians are peacemakers. **Jesus is saying that people who have become sons of God have the character of their heavenly Father, and one of the descriptive phrases about our heavenly Father is that He is a God of peace.** (Romans 16:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:23)

Just for fun I googled the word 'Peace' to see what was on the internet. In .16 seconds I got 287,000,000 results for peace. I found peace organizations, peace projects, peace prizes, peace poles peace colleges, peace endowments and peace gardens. I found out that there are Jews for peace, Buddhists for peace, musicals for peace, women and children for peace, (apparently however, there are no men for peace). But there are a lot of people looking in a lot of places for this thing called peace. So we are going to begin this series with a look at five principles of real peace.

## **Real peace is a Priority to God**

The first principle is that real peace is a **priority** to God. Consider who God sent to restore peace in a broken and conflicted world. He did not send an angel, mighty as they are. He did not raise up a mighty army to suppress conflict, enforce justice, and impose unity on the nations. Nor did he send a delegation of gifted men to teach us how to find peace. Peace is such a high priority to God that he did not send any secondary lieutenants to bring us this treasure. Instead, he sent his only Son, the most exalted and powerful ambassador who has ever walked the face of the earth.

**Listen to Jesus' credentials:** *He is the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth, or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.'* Colossians 1:15-20

And this was no casual or last minute assignment. As 1 Peter 1:20 tells us, Jesus was chosen for this task *"before the creation of the world."* God's priority for peace is emphasized by the fact that He planned for reconciliation even before the world and all our conflicts came into existence! Since God has made peace one of his highest priorities, He calls us to do the same. He does not want us to treat estrangement from Him or others as an insignificant matter. He expects us to make more than a token effort to seek peace with others. He teaches us never to delay going to someone who may have something against us. In fact, his priority for peace is so high that Jesus commands us to seek reconciliation with others even before we seek to worship God himself!

**Consider our Lord's command in Matthew 5:23-24:** *"So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. "* In other words, you cannot say that you are at peace with God when you are not at peace with your brother or sister. Reconciliation always comes before worship. Think of your own case before Christ. Before you experienced any desire to worship God, you had to be reconciled to God through believing in His Son. What more could God say to indicate how high a priority He places on peace? He sent His most exalted ambassador to make peace on earth. And He commands us not to approach Him to worship unless we have made every reasonable effort to seek peace with those around us. By His example and commands, God has placed peace at the top of His list of priorities.

## **Real peace is Expensive**

Consider the price that was paid to purchase our peace. The Son of God had to leave the glory of heaven, descend into a fallen and corrupt world, take on the form of a helpless baby, walk countless miles over deserts and dusty roads, submit to mocking, beating and torture, and shed His own life's blood on the cross. What price can we place on these services? As the only Son of God, Jesus' life and blood was infinitely precious. If His atoning work could somehow be converted into pure gold, all the vaults in the world could not hold the treasure.

Why would God be willing to pay such a high price for our salvation? He tells us over and over in Scripture: it is love that moved him to pay the supreme price for our peace and salvation. Remember what Jesus said in John 3:16: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* In his first letter, **the apostle repeats and expands on this theme:** *In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.* 1 John 4:9-11

Note the response that God is looking for in us: if we understand and treasure the love that he has shown toward us, we will be eager to be a channel of that same love into the lives of others. If that love is flowing through our lives, we will be willing and even eager to pay whatever price is necessary to be reconciled with others, just as Christ paid an infinitely expensive price—his very life!—to be reconciled with us. Ask yourself today, “Is Jesus’ love living in me? Am I as passionate about peace and reconciliation as he is? Will I pay the price required to spread peace and reconciliation with others, as God has with me?”

1 Peter 5:6 says, *“Humble yourself under God’s mighty hand.”* Will you humble yourself, stop trying to prove your own righteousness, cast aside your lifelong tactics for resolving conflict, and follow God’s path for making peace, no matter how difficult it may be? **In in His kingdom discourse, Jesus says,** *Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.* Matthew 7:3-5 Will you stop dwelling on what others have done wrong and confess, in detail and with sincere sorrow, how you have contributed to a conflict or broken relationship?

**In Philippians 2:3-4, the apostle Paul writes,** *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”* Philippians 2:3-4 Will you admit that others may understand a conflict situation more accurately than you do? And will you give as much effort to identifying and meeting their interests as you do your own?

To the Ephesians, Paul writes, *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.* Ephesians 4:32 What about the person who has deeply wronged you? Gossiped about you? Betrayed your trust? Failed to keep a commitment? Damaged your property or reputation? What price will you pay to encourage that person’s repentance and restore peace in your relationship? Will you let go of bitterness? Will you give up self-pity? Will you divest yourself of the desire to make that person suffer for the wrong he or she has done to you? O brothers and sisters, Jesus paid a far greater price to secure your forgiveness from God! His love gladly overflowed in the supreme sacrifice. He now invites you to overflow with the same kind of love and glad sacrifice -- not as a way to repay a debt, but as a way of joyfully reflecting and celebrating the love of Christ in your life.

## **Real peace requires an Ally**

I’m sure all of us would love to overflow with this kind of love and ability to make peace. But the price of peace is often far too expensive, isn’t it? When we have been deeply or repeatedly wronged, the cost of reconciliation exceeds our meager resources. We have too little love, humility, compassion and forgiveness to cover the damage caused by sin and conflict. This is why real peace requires an **ally**. We cannot, on our own, fully pay the high price of reconciliation. We cannot wash away another person’s sins. We cannot cleanse our own hearts from bitterness and self-righteousness. We cannot forgive as God has forgiven us. But there is One, Christ Jesus the Lord, who can do all these things, and He is eager to come to our side, bear the full cost of sin, and give us all the support and resources we need to restore peace with those around us.

**Colossians 1:19-20 tells us that** *God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth, or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.’* Colossians 1:19-20 God would not be pleased to reconcile two people to himself, but leave them at odds with each other. His reconciliation is all-encompassing. Therefore, He is eager to come alongside each of his children and become our ally in pursuing peace with others. **As Philippians 2:13 promises,** *“for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”* You have an ally who is eager to see you make peace with others. And this ally is not distant or passive. He is near you, and he is ready to place all of His resources at your disposal. Christ is ready to come to your aid. Seek His counsel; bank on His limitless resources; trust that He will never leave your side as you seek peace with others.

## Real peace is found only at the Cross

All other attempts to find peace are doomed to failure because real peace is found only at the **cross**. Colossians 1:20 teaches that it was at the cross that Jesus shed His blood to pay for our sins, purchase our peace, and reconcile us to God. This gift can be found nowhere else in the world. **As Acts 4:12 proclaims, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."** Acts 4:12 It is at the cross alone that the gospel of Christ is revealed: Jesus has freed us from the penalty of sin, made peace between us and God, and given us the ability to break free from the sinful attitudes and habits that foster conflict and obstruct reconciliation.

As you kneel at the foot of the cross, you will find inspiration, grace, and power to make peace with others. As Ken Sande writes in *The Peacemaker*, **'Take hold of the liberating promises of the gospel. Trust that Jesus has forgiven your sins, and confess them freely. Believe that he is using the pressures of conflict to help you to grow, and cooperate with him. Depend on his assurance that he always watching over you, and stop fearing what others might do to you. Know that he delights to display his sanctifying power in your life, and attempt to do things that you could never accomplish in your own strength, such as forgiving someone who has hurt you deeply.'**

## Real peace has Eternal consequences

Finally, real peace has **eternal** consequences. When Jesus shed His blood on the cross, He opened the door for us to be fully reconciled to God, to enter the halls of heaven, and to enjoy the Father's love forever. **As Jesus promised in John 6:47, "I tell you the truth, He who believes has everlasting life."** John 6:47 And inherent in this gift of peace is the privilege and responsibility of sharing the message of eternal life with others. **As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17-20: "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."**

If you have received peace, reconciliation, and eternal life through Jesus, he calls you to share this gift with others. Although words alone will sometimes be enough to draw others to the Savior, Jesus taught that our most persuasive testimony is communicated by how we love one another. In John 13:34-35, he said, **"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."**

The love that is most eye-catching and persuasive to the world is not the love that we show to those who love us. As Jesus taught in Luke 6:27-36, anyone can love those who love them. What marks us as sons and daughters of God is our love for those who are in conflict with us. When we love and forgive those who have deeply hurt us, or humbly confess our own wrongs, we are demonstrating the reality and reconciling power of Christ in our lives. In doing so we are giving others a taste of the peace and reconciliation they can find in Jesus. Thus God may use our witness as peacemakers to lead others to trust in Christ and find eternal peace through Him.

Peacemaking leads to real peace – shalom, wholeness, completeness, harmony restored and the fabric of our relationships mended and made right.. **The gospel calls us, by the mercy and grace that reconciled us to God to be reconciled to one another and to be reconciliators – peacemakers in the world and in the church.**

*Our gracious God and Savior,*

*Grant that we would be peacemakers, not peacebreakers. Forbid Lord that we would treasure our self-interests and pride above reconciliation and peace. Help us to work hard at unraveling the unraveled, striving to bring harmony out of discord, to be committed to restoring peace where there is now war. Help us to value and give peace the high priority that You do. May we pay the price required to spread peace and reconciliation with others, as You have so graciously done with us. Come alongside and help us restore shalom in all those places where our lives are at odds with each other. Grant O Lord that we would live in the shadow of the cross where Your mercy triumphs and grace abounds. Let us embrace the liberating promises of the gospel that called us by the mercy and grace of God and live as peacemakers in the world and in the church, we pray in the precious and powerful name of Christ Jesus our Lord, Amen.*