

Mt. 5:9; Romans 10:1-15

Applying Ourselves to the Mission of the Kingdom

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God – v. 9

In tracing the spiritual progression that we've been noting in our studies of the beatitudes, you could say that we began by looking in. *Blessed are the poor in spirit* – this beatitude leads us to look in where we discover that we're spiritually bankrupt. We're also looking in during the 2nd beatitude – *blessed are they that mourn*. Our inward look provides for us plenty to mourn over – for not only do we discover our spiritual bankruptcy, but we also face our sinfulness and this gives us much to mourn over.

Beginning in the 3rd beatitude we begin to shift our discerning gaze so that we're no longer looking in but we begin looking up. We're looking to God and to Christ. We see how helpless and hopeless we are and so we look to God with the hope that He'll be merciful to us. We're willing to submit to whatever terms He would place before us in order to save us from the condemnation we deserve. We look up, being meek – meek in the sense that we're willing to surrender to God.

Our gaze continues to look up when we read in the next beatitude *blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness*. We look to Christ who alone is righteous to provide what we do not have ourselves. And the blessed news that comes from the kingdom of heaven and gains us entrance into the kingdom of heaven is the news that God, in His grace, provides for us the righteousness that we lacked and could not gain by anything we could do.

Our lives are transformed by what God provides in His grace – so much so that we're willing to be merciful – we're willing to forgive those that have done us wrong because we know and appreciate how much we've been forgiven. We're very much aware that God's mercy has been great toward us. You might say that this 5th beatitude on being merciful prepares us for the service that we will soon render to Christ – but still our gaze is heavenward – especially as we move on to the next beatitude – *blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*.

In this beatitude we begin to strive for our loftiest ideal – which is to abide in the presence of Christ in such a way that we behold Him with the eye of faith and we anticipate that the day is coming that we will see Him with the fleshly eye – when He returns and we're at last perfectly conformed to His image. In the mean time we strive for purity in the sense that we strive to measure up to the righteousness that He's freely bestowed on us in His grace and we strive to do away with anything that comes between us and God. Sin obscures our vision of Christ and hinders our enjoyment of Christ and so sin must go.

I can remember in my own conversion experience that once I had come to Christ I had questions about what was legitimate and what was not. Much of the mud of the world was still clinging to me and I had been so much a part of the counter culture of the 70's that I

wondered whether or not I needed to give up drugs and give up alcohol. It didn't take me long to discover, however, that these things got in my way. They didn't contribute to my fellowship with Christ, they got in the way of my vision of Christ and it became an easy decision that these things must be put behind me.

I wonder today what things get in your way when it comes to beholding Christ and enjoying His presence? It can be any number of things which in and of themselves may not even be morally wrong. It seems that so many that name the name of Christ today are so bent on justifying the things they think they can do and when they can do them. *Why can't I have my entertainment?* – many of them ask – and *why can't I have it even on the Lord's Day?* And without entering the debate about what's legitimate and what's not I would simply point out what a far cry such a rationale is from the ideal presented by the 6th beatitude – *blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* If you've known anything at all of the blessing of fellowship with God, if you've been drawn into His presence, if you've been enabled to taste and see that the Lord is good then you should make your highest priority to do away with anything that would rob you of the blessing of His presence and fellowship.

We come, then, to the 7th beatitude in which we find our gaze shifting again. *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.* Our gaze began by looking in – then we looked up – and now at last do we begin to look out. And what this beatitude indicates to us on the surface of it is that we realize how bountifully blessed we are and our desire now intensifies for others that we see as needy as we were – others that are also spiritually bankrupt who ought to be mourning over their sins who also are lacking in righteousness – our desire for them is that they might discover the same thing we've discovered – which is the peace of God that passes all understanding – a peace that provides us with joy and tranquility and stability through fair winds and stormy seas.

Remember the theme of these beatitudes as well as the theme for the sermon on the mount which is the theme of the kingdom of heaven. This sermon is about that kingdom. It pertains to living in that kingdom. We have entered into this kingdom as believers in Jesus Christ and our loyalty now is to this kingdom – indeed our highest priority is to be the advancement of this kingdom. Having experienced the spiritual progression that is set forth by these beatitudes our desire now is to serve our Savior and King in this kingdom. And the question that naturally arises is this – what form does that service take? How is this desire to serve realized?

The 7th beatitude provides the answer. The subjects of the kingdom of heaven take on the ministry of a peacemaker. *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children (or sons) of God.* What a contrast, then, to the way the kingdom of heaven advances to the way the kingdoms of the world are advanced. The kingdoms of the world are most often advanced through carnal conquests with the use of arms. Christ drew a very sharp contrast in this respect especially between His kingdom and the kingdoms of the world. So we read in Jn. 18:36 Christ's word to Pontius Pilate *My kingdom is not of this*

world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.

It's interesting, isn't it, that nowhere do we read either in modern day publication or in history of Christian suicide bombers. You can find Emperor worshippers that would embrace death and you can find the worshippers of false gods that will embrace death but the Christian has embraced peace and in the interest of that peace he presents himself a living sacrifice to God in order to advance the kingdom of heaven.

And so this beatitude sets before us the truth that the subject of the kingdom of heaven advances that cause by taking up the ministry of the peacemaker. And so today that you might be equipped and encouraged to take up such a ministry I want to make such a ministry the focus of our study today.

The peacemaker's ministry, then, is our theme:

We Must Apply Ourselves to the Ministry of the Peacemaker

Would you consider with me first of all, then, that if we would apply ourselves to such a ministry:

I. We Must Know the Realms Where Such a Ministry is Needed

Blessed are the peacemakers our beatitude reads. And it really isn't too difficult to find the realms where this beatitude needs to be applied. All you need do is look around you and see a world that is filled with strife and anger and violence and hatred. We read about such things and hear about such things on a daily basis through the media. At times it makes you wonder why they even call it news. It seems much too common to be considered newsworthy.

But you don't have to go to far away places to see where peace is missing. You can find it near at hand – even in your neighborhoods. I was told by someone a while back that domestic disputes and domestic violence are the things that most often lead to calls to the police. On any given day, it would seem, the thing that police officers will have to respond to most are reports of domestic violence or disputes. They're called upon to step between ranting and raving spouses that are at times literally on the brink of killing each other. Each blames the other – each demands that the other be arrested and taken to jail. So we find the need for peace in our neighborhoods.

And then there's the church. You wouldn't think that the church would be a place where peace would be missing and peace would be needed but sadly that is often the case. You can find strife in the church. I dare say that most new churches that are started today are the result of strife which broke out in the old church. It's nothing new. Even in Paul's day you could find strife and division and competition and the kind of anger that would lead all the way to taking a Christian brother to a secular court of law. It seems that in the church at Corinth Christians were suing other Christians. And you could find personality factions

and doctrinal factions and you could undoubtedly find factions that were based on different kinds of practices in that church at Corinth. The faction that had no qualms about eating meat offered to idols would be distinct from the faction that found such a practice to be a violation of their conscience. And one faction would regard the other as being idolatrous and the idolatrous faction would see the other as being legalistic. And on and on the strife of the church proceeds. And all I've been describing is strife within a church – to say nothing of strife between churches or between denominations.

But alas – we don't have to go as far as church to find strife and the absence of peace. Dare we admit it – we can find strife in our own homes? I would hope that none of us would be guilty of the kind of violence that leads to calls to the police – but on the other hand we do know those times where spouses are at odds with each other and parents are at odds with their children and children are at odds with each other and parents can experience friction between themselves over how the children should be handled because of their fighting and bickering with each other – and it wouldn't be so bad if Dad was home more and Dad could stay home more if nobody wanted to eat or wear clothes or have electricity etc. etc. And so it would seem that there are times when peace seems to be as far removed from us as the most distant planet.

And still you don't have to look out even as far as the four walls of your home to find the absence of peace. *From whence come wars and fightings among you?* – James asks in his epistle (4:1) *come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?* We need look no further than our own hearts in order to find a place where peace is absent. James, it would seem, nails down the place where all strife begins. Our own internal strife can be viewed as the point of origin from which many other manifestations of strife spring forth.

All of which emphasizes the need for the ministry of peace. We could read or interpret the beatitude to mean – *what a blessing to have a peacemaker!* What a blessing to have someone on hand whether it be in our homes or in our churches that knows how to minister and lead in such a way that peace becomes our portion rather than strife.

Before we ever can be used to serve the cause of the kingdom of heaven we must first be enabled to minister peace to our own hearts. Such a ministry must begin with ourselves. If we're not at peace in our own hearts we'll never be effective at ministering it to others. We must know how to minister the gospel to our own hearts first and from there this ministry of peace can then be carried forward to our homes, to our church, to our neighborhoods, and beyond.

The scope for such a ministry, then, is very broad and the need is very great. What a blessing to have a church with peacemakers rather than a church with strife stirrers. As broad as such a need is – it is also very important that we know just how such a ministry is to be executed. There's a right way and a wrong way, you see, to be a peacemaker and this leads to my next point. Not only must we know the realms to which such a ministry applies but:

II. We Must Know the Manner in Which Peace is to be Ministered

It's important that we know exactly what Christ meant when He said *blessed are the peacemakers*. And I think it's worth keeping in mind that Christ not only said *blessed are the peacemakers* but this same Jesus also said – {Mt. 10:32-40}.

The contrast between these words of Christ with our beatitude appears so great that we might be tempted to wonder whether or not it's the same person speaking in both passages. We know that it is definitely Christ that is speaking in both passages and we also know that there are no contradictions in the Scriptures. What may appear to be a contradiction on the surface can be resolved by knowing the nature of the peace that Christ describes and by knowing the means through which peace is to be established and maintained.

And so we can draw the application from this seemingly difficult passage in Mt. 10 that peace does not come and should not be sought at the expense of the truth of Christ. This is tantamount to sacrificing our loyalty to Christ. This has always been the tendency of the ecumenical movement. As long as any church or any denomination or any cult for that matter wears the label *Christian* then we ought to be broad enough and charitable enough in our outlook to treat the differences between us as being so minor that they're insignificant. And to the degree that Protestants are lured into such a mindset – to that same degree they rob themselves of their peace.

I'm glad that in recent days the Pope of Rome has seen fit to declare that the church of Rome is the only true church. I'm glad that the essential differences between Protestantism and Catholicism are at last beginning to be highlighted again. And I find it interesting that the reason that this church and that other Protestant churches are not true churches is because we have no continuing sacramental priesthood nor do we recognize the primacy of the Pope. And to both of these accusations I say – Amen – guilty as charged.

We have no continuing sacramental priesthood because we know that the sacrifice of Christ is a once and for all accomplishment. And we ascribe no primacy to the Pope because he seeks to usurp the office that belongs to Christ alone. He comes between us and Christ and we need no mediator between us and Christ. Christ is our Mediator – why would we accept the mediator of a common sinner – especially one who harbors blasphemy for his doctrine?

No doubt a lot of liberal Protestant churches are discouraged by such dogmatism coming from the Pope. Liberal Protestants, you see, have been willing to sacrifice so much of their own dogmatism even over doctrines that have been the hallmarks of the Reformation so that it can be said today that there are no essential differences between Rome's doctrine of justification by faith and the Protestants doctrine of justification by faith. The differences are really minor and are merely matters of semantics we'd be led to believe.

Isn't it sad – how many Protestants were burned at stakes because of a mere matter of semantics? The truth is that when we compromise the doctrine of Christ or the doctrine of justification by faith then we deprive ourselves of the peace that ought to be our portion

and we disqualify ourselves from being peacemakers. When peace is sought at the expense of the gospel then peace becomes the thing that will never be truly attained. Such compromise brings to my mind the words of Jonah 2:8 – *They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.*

I could draw the application from Jonah's words that they which compromise on the doctrine of justification by faith forsake their own peace. *For being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* we read in Rom. 5:1. Our peace, you see, is a matter of conscience. If we can't understand exactly how the justice of God relates to our pardon and acceptance then we'll never truly know peace in our hearts. It's only as we understand and appreciate that by virtue of our union to Christ and His atoning death we can have peace with God because we know with assurance that the justice of God has been satisfied through Christ's shed blood. This is what enables us to have peace – the assurance we know in the realm of our conscience that God's justice has been satisfied and salvation by grace through faith in Christ is consistent with the justice of God.

So peace is not to be advanced through compromise. When it comes to the truth of the gospel we must take our stand even if it means standing against those that might be near and dear to us. We contribute nothing to their peace by forsaking the gospel and we contribute nothing to our own peace by compromising the gospel.

The way peace is promoted and advanced, you see, is by promoting Christ who is the Prince of peace. And this becomes the manner, then, in which peace is positively advanced. If we would advance peace then we must exalt Christ. If we would become peacemakers in our service to the kingdom of heaven then we must be able to encourage others in the gospel of peace.

And as Christ is exalted and the gospel of Christ is understood and appreciated and appropriated by faith then peace will be the portion of the believer's heart – and peace will rule in our homes, and peace will prevail in our church and peace will be advanced in our communities.

The wrong way to advance peace, then, is through compromise – the right way to advance peace is by honoring and exalting Christ. When He occupies His rightful place in our hearts, a place which calls for our highest loyalty and allegiance – then His peace will be the force that carries us forward and brings us stability and enables us to endure even when persecution becomes our portion. When Christ is honored then peace will come to our hearts, our homes, our churches and our communities. Where the gospel of peace is understood – there peace will reign.

And so the ministry of the peacemaker becomes the ministry of exalting the Prince of peace. The ministry of the peacemaker is the ministry of knowing how to apply the doctrine of justification to every area of life. This is why Paul tells the Christians at Ephesus that they're to have their feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15). As Christ increases in our hearts then so does our peace.

And so we see the realms where the ministry of the peacemaker is needed. We see further that there's a right way and a wrong way to minister peace. Consider finally that in order to apply ourselves to the ministry of the peacemaker

III. We Should be Encouraged by the Honor that the Peacemaker Acquires

Blessed are the peacemakers our text reads *for they shall be called the children of God.*

Nothing so reveals the true identity of the subjects of the kingdom of heaven as their conformity to Christ – the Prince of peace. I find it interesting that the term *peacemaker* occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. We do find, however, a verb form of the noun in Col 1:20 *And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, [I say], whether [they be] things in earth, or things in heaven.*

Christ is the One who made peace, such a peace that is grounded in His atoning death – and the subjects of His kingdom are the ones who declare the peace that is grounded in His accomplishment. And in our service and allegiance to Him that is shown in our efforts to live by and promote the peace that He's accomplished, we acquire the honor of being identified by Him as belonging to Him.

I know them Christ says in Jn. 10:27; *He calleth his own sheep by name* He says earlier in the same chapter (10:3). *Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure*, Paul writes to Timothy (2Tim. 2:19) *having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.*

To be identified as a child of the king becomes a very high honor, then, especially when it's Christ that makes the identification. There's a verse in Acts 11 that has been a source of controversy through the years. We read in Acts 11:26 that *the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch*. It's thought by some that the term *Christian* was a designation of reproach given to the followers of Christ out of a sense of contempt that was held toward them.

Dr. Cairns takes the view that it was a designation assigned to them by God Himself – the term meaning literally *a Christ-like one*. We certainly take on His resemblance when we endeavor to promote the peace that was accomplished by His atoning death.

And so I wonder today – are you enjoying the peace that is to be your portion? You've been called to this peace according to Paul in Col. 3:15. This peace is supposed to rule in your hearts, he says in that same verse. The devil certainly works hard to deprive us of that peace or to lure us away from the grounds of that peace. But his work only underscores the need for us all to encourage one another in the gospel of peace. This is the ministry of the peacemaker. He endeavors to extend the kingdom of heaven through the means of peace and he seeks to encourage his fellow subjects in the kingdom by the gospel of peace. And in so striving he acquires the honor of being identified as one of Christ's own.

May the Lord, then, so fill your hearts with His peace and may you know with conviction and assurance the grounds of your peace that you too will come to know the truth that *blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.*