

Life Attitudes: Peacemakers

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We're in a 4 week series right now called Life Attitudes. This series is about taking a look at how our inner character determines our outward action. And more than that, this series is based on words of Jesus that invite us to look inwardly at our character to see if it reflects God's character. The challenge in these scriptures is for us to allow God the space and control to transform us into more Christ-like people.

These sayings of Jesus that we are looking at are called "The Beatitudes", and they are found in Matthew 5:1-12. It's a collection of sayings that fly in the face of conventional or worldly values. All of them begin with the phrase: "Blessed are." What is unusual is the list of those who are blessed; the poor in spirit, the meek, the mourners, the persecuted. And we've talked about what Jesus means by "blessed". Blessing is very different than happiness. Happiness is about circumstance, blessing is about the joy of being in relationship with God. Looking at the list of those who are blessed, according to Jesus, none of them have anything to do with happiness or circumstance; all of them have to do with being in relationship with God.

In this series, we've already looked at "Blessed are the poor in spirit" and "Blessed are the meek". Today, we're letting Matthew 5:9 speak to us:



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

Now peace-making must be very near to the heart of God, very near to God-likeness,

because Jesus says that it is the peace-maker who will be called a child of God. In other words, they have a striking resemblance to their heavenly Father!

I pray for the two children in the world who have to go through life bearing any resemblance to this (motion to my face)! Thankfully, they also have the beauty of their mother to help them out! What I really pray is that they will want to resemble me and Jennifer in character, only because they see that we have some resemblance to our heavenly father.

In the other sayings, the other Beatitudes, Jesus says that some will inherit the earth, some will inherit the Kingdom, some will be comforted, filled, or shown mercy, and some will see God. But it is the peace-maker who will be called a child of God because she has a striking resemblance to her heavenly Father.

So before we get too far into what makes a peace-maker, I want us to understand the Biblical/Hebrew meaning of peace. It comes from the Hebrew



word, “shalom”. This word for peace does not mean the absence of trouble or conflict, but it means “wholeness”. Shalom peace means experiencing wholeness or well-being even in the midst of trouble. Peace is not the absence of chaos, but well-being in the midst of chaos. You can experience the

wholeness or well-being of God even in a storm. It can be a financial storm, relational storm, personal storm, but you can still experience peace because shalom-peace is not dependent upon our circumstances, but on the presence of God in our life.

Jesus’ understanding of peace, shalom, is also based on our relationship with God. This is the kind of peace Jesus mentions in John 14, when he says, “My peace I give to you – I don’t give it as the world gives it.” It’s a different kind of peace – one based on our relationship with him. Paul also mentions this kind of peace in Philippians 4:7, “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding...” Why does God’s peace transcend our understanding?

Because the peace we can see, that we can understand has to do with the circumstances around us. The peace of God has to do with the wholeness and well-being that comes with God's mysterious presence in our life, and that's something we can experience even when the circumstances around us don't seem peaceful.

So being a peace-maker, then, means that God is calling us not to shy away from the storms, but to be people who actively engage in the storms and struggles of others so that everyone can experience the wholeness of God, the Shalom of God, the peace of God.

Now there is a tremendous difference between being a peace-maker and being a peace-keeper. And there are lots of us in the room who are peace-keepers by nature. I am! Peace-keepers want to avoid conflict. Peace-keepers say things like, "Why can't we all just get along?"

Now the world needs peace-keepers, I guess if for no other reason than to keep the rest of you from hurting one another. The problem is that peace-keepers want to avoid conflict so much that they will do it at almost any cost, even the cost of shalom.

What I mean is this: we don't have shalom, or wholeness, when someone is wronged, oppressed, or treated unjustly. And if we don't want to cause trouble or conflict to keep peace, but we don't work to change the injustice or oppression or evil that exists, then peace-keeping is just extending wrong-doing and is not contributing to building God's kingdom.

Peace-makers, on the other hand, are willing to work through conflict or turmoil to get to wholeness; fairness, justice and right-relationship. Martin Luther King, Jr, was viewed by many as a trouble-maker, when, in actuality he was a peace-maker. He couldn't sit passively on the sidelines of life and watch injustice become a permanent fixture in the community, so he used non-violent conflict to raise up this injustice, destroying the power of evil and delivering hope to a nation broken by racism.

Peacemakers intervene with aggressive love and action in the face of evil or injustice or need. Peacemakers use the fruit of the Spirit as their weapons. The fruit of the Spirit are found in Galatians 5:22; ***The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*** Peacemakers don't fight hate with hate, they fight it with love, joy, peace, patience...self-control. Peace-makers engage their world with aggressive love and action to help bring the Kingdom of God on earth.

Peace-makers work in two different directions at the same time.

BREAK DOWN BARRIERS



Peacemakers break down barriers so that all of God's children can experience wholeness. Think of all the barriers that Jesus broke. He was on the front line every day, dismantling evil and injustice. In Luke's gospel account, Jesus launches his public ministry in his

hometown by reading this passage from the prophet Isaiah. , ***"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed."***

Jesus was about breaking down any barriers that separated people from God or from their God-given purpose. Throughout his ministry, he confronted religious leaders and conquered barriers that hindered people from experiencing God's well-being in their life. Jesus used aggressive love and action against the religious leaders who were burdening the people with laws and rituals that kept pushing the masses further and further away from meaningful relationship with God.

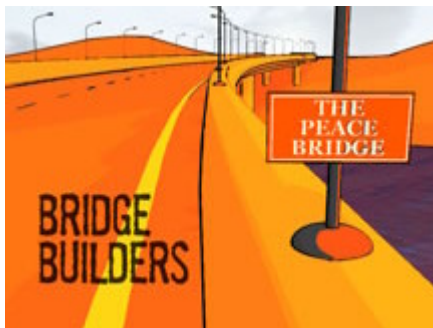
Look at the woman who was about to be stoned to death for committing adultery. Instead of condemnation and rejection and death, Jesus offers

forgiveness and mercy and a new opportunity with God. Zaccheaus, a tax collector, was also kept outside of the community of faith because of his sin. But in his encounter with Jesus, he receives a new opportunity to be a child of God – an opportunity he would never have had before because of the barriers of his sin. In all kinds of situations, Jesus was breaking down the barriers that existed between people and God. And most of the time, that meant he was breaking down social orders and structures that had been in place for a very long time.

The cross is the greatest way that Jesus breaks down barriers. What Jesus accomplished through the cross was to break down the ultimate barrier between us and God – our sin! This is a barrier we cannot overcome on our own. And through his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus breaks down this barrier and opens up a way for us to be in relationship with God.

So peacemakers knock down the walls of separation between people; they attack (with the fruit of the spirit) any power-structures that oppress people; they fight for justice for all of God's children and they break down the things that inhibit or prevent people from finding their shalom with God – their peace with God.

BUILD BRIDGES



Peacemakers break down barriers that separate people from God and one-another...from experiencing shalom. That's one direction they move. The other direction is that they build bridges of relationship. Everything that Jesus did was about building relationships.

He hung out with folks that nobody else hung out with because his mission was about building bridges and relationships with the least and the lost. He wanted everyone to experience Shalom – God's peace in their lives, and he knew that shalom comes through the relationship with God.

One day, Jesus had been invited to dinner at the home of a Pharisee named Simon. This woman showed up and began to wash Jesus' feet with her

tears and dry them with her hair. She just crashed the dinner party. That's when the Pharisee started putting up the barriers. Let's take a look at Luke 7:39-50;

39. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

40. Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said.

41. "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.

42. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

43. Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

44. Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

45. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet.

46. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.

47. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

48. Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

49. The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

50. Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Jesus was about building bridges to people so that they could experience the shalom of God...God's peace in their lives....a peace that comes through relationship with God. And Jesus is calling us, his body, to do the same....to build bridges; to make peace not just keep peace; to stay on the front line and not tolerate injustice but to create and celebrate a ministry that represents and reflects the kingdom of heaven...to build bridges of hope and opportunity and forgiveness and healing.

I took a few minutes this week to just reflect about Saint Paul's. How are we doing as peacemakers, as bridge builders? And you know, every ministry I could think of is a bridge-building ministry at its heart. Vacation Bible School is coming up soon...that's a ministry to help children from our church and our community build their relationship with God...to know God's love and peace in

their life. Any children's or student ministry here has that same bridge-building, relationship-building motive at its heart.

All of our adult courses and classes and small groups have that same motive...to build bridges of relationship to God and one another. One in particular that I want to highlight today is our Alpha Course. It will be starting on August 30th this fall. But this is a ministry specifically designed to help us build bridges of relationships to people in our community who may be experiencing brokenness or who are searching for God in their life. It is a course that has helped many people find shalom in their life.

All of our work in local mission is about building bridges. We have people involved at Watered Gardens, Children's Haven, Crosslines, Lafayette House, Turnaround Ranch, and on and on. They are out there building bridges – building relationships.

The Salvage Yard is building bridges of hope and healing and shalom in the lives of people who would not search for it by going to a church building. And it's amazing and inspiring!

Your response to our partnership with Rainbow Network is building bridges of hope and opportunity and shalom with the people of Nicaragua.

Shalom – the peace of God that surpasses all understanding – is what Jesus came to share with us. I think back to Luke's story of the birth of Jesus and I see that it started there...this barrier breaking, bridge building shalom of God. The angel came down to share the good news with the shepherds. And then a chorus of angels appeared and sang a song; "Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace and goodwill to all." And the shepherds went to find God's shalom lying in a manger.

And through the cross, Jesus – the shalom of God – makes peace with God on our behalf, offering himself as the sacrifice for our sins, and he builds the bridge for us to have a personal, eternal relationship with God through his resurrection from the dead.

Shalom – the peace of God that surpasses all understanding – is what Jesus calls us to share with others in his name!



INSERT TEXT BELOW:

Near to the heart of God are those who break barriers and build bridges to bring God's shalom to others; they bear a striking resemblance to their heavenly Father.

Will you pray with me?