

Peacemakers

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Preacher: Rev Fergus A.J.Macdonald

[0 : 00] Now to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5. Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5, and verse 9.

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

The word peace is surely one which haunts the modern world. The last 10 years, indeed the last 20 years, have seen an almost endless series of peace conferences seeking to produce solutions to some of the most intractable problems of inter-human hostility.

We have seen this particularly in recent years in the Middle East and in Northern Ireland. And not only in the international scene, but also in the realm of personal relationships, solutions are being sought for peace between people of differing race, differing religion, on different sides of industry. We live in a generation which has seen the rise of the science of psychiatry with the specific purpose of facilitating people to have peace of mind.

[1 : 34] Yes, peace is a word which haunts the world and which haunts us, because it describes a quality which is more frequently conspicuous by its absence than by its presence.

When we turn to the Bible, we discover that the Bible has a lot to say about peace. The word peace occurs no less than 88 times in the New Testament.

It is found in every single book of the New Testament. Paul begins every letter of his with a prayer for peace for those who are to read and to listen to these letters being read.

And frequently they end with a phrase such as, Peace be to you all. And so the Bible, I repeat, has a great deal to say about peace.

But when we come to the Bible, we discover immediately that its idea of peace is very much wider. We might say that our concept of peace may be a foot long, if we can use a description.

[2 : 45] When we come to the Bible, we discover that it's two feet long. It's a much longer, a much wider concept. We tend to think of peace as the absence of war.

As the absence of hostility. We speak about peace in the Middle East today. But the Bible would never speak about peace between Jew and Aaron.

And the terms that exist between even Israel and Egypt today. When we come to the Bible, we discover that peace is much more than the absence of hostility.

It includes much more. It is also a positive enrichment. It's a wider concept, a completeness. One is at peace when one is enjoying perfect welfare and serenity.

And so this peace does not prevail in the Middle East where there is suspicion, where there is bigotry, where there is hatred, and where there is fear.

[3 : 52] And as long as there is hatred, and fear, and suspicion, peace, in the biblical sense, does not exist.

And so the Bible tells us that peace is much more than a piece of paper. It is much more than a formal agreement. Peace has to do with our personal relationships, the one with the other, and national relationships, one nation with the other.

Ultimately, peace is not something which is political, not something which is military, although there are aspects, obviously, to peace which are political and military. But peace is something interpersonal.

Peace is something which operates at a personal level. The Bible speaks of three dimensions of peace. First of all, peace with God.

We've been studying in the morning service the epistle to the Romans for a good while now. And one of the best known verses in that epistle is Romans chapter 5, verse 1.

[5 : 00] Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Peace with God. You see, the Bible insists that there's something wrong, something radically wrong

between us and God.

That we and God are out of relation. We're out of harmony. We're out of step. As evidence of this, it cites the fact that there is guilt in the human race.

That every man says Paul has a conscience and his conscience accuses him. Why? Because he has broken God's law. A law which is written in his heart. All of us have a guilt complex.

Some more aware of it than others. But nevertheless, it is there in all. And I think this is the reason why so many people feel uncomfortable in God's presence. They feel uncomfortable even when God's name is reverently used.

In the very chapter in which Paul opens by declaring that we are justified by faith and have peace with God, he goes to the root of the disharmony.

[6 : 12] And he speaks of us being sinners and being enemies of God. And yet, in spite of the fact that we are sinners, in spite of the fact that we are enemies, God has demonstrated his love in sending his son to live and to die for us.

And so we are out of relationship with God. We are enemies of God. We are in rebellion against God. We shake the fist in God's face.

And Paul, writing to the Colossians, tells them that this is the result of our own fault. You were, he said, alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works.

Or as the Good News Bible has it, you made yourselves his enemies by the evil things you did and thought. And that is why we are in the wrong with God.

Because we have made ourselves his enemies by the evil things we do and think. This rebellion concerns not only our actions but also our thoughts.

[7 : 21] Our Lord made it quite clear that we could not simply satisfy ourselves in relation to the commandments by looking purely at the realm of outward action, inner motivation, inner thoughts, out of the crucial importance.

Paul, writing to the Romans, says that the carnal mind or the mind of the flesh, the mind of the person who does not believe in Jesus Christ, is hostility against God, is enmity against God.

And this says Paul is the picture that he sees and the picture that God has given him of the state of the human race. Apart from Jesus Christ and apart from the reconciliation of the gospel, there is enmity against God.

There is hostility against God. There is a revolt, a rebellion against God which goes deep and which is outright.

The whole of our personalities involved. Emil Brunner, a German theologian of one generation prior to ours, wrote a book and he called it Man in Revolt.

[8 : 36] This sums up the crisis that is facing the human race. We have made ourselves the enemies of God. And when the Bible speaks of man as an enemy, of God.

It is not thinking of enemy in the sense of being a little short of being a friend, but of being in the other camp. And that's exactly what happened in the Garden of Eden.

Adam changed sides. He went over to the enemy. He joined the serpent. He rebelled against God.

Paul, Paul, writing to the Colossians, uses the word alienated, as we have seen. And this word is a word which speaks of the action of God towards us.

We have made ourselves the enemies of God and as a result, God has alienated us in the sense of declaring us to be aliens. And again, to go back to the Garden of Eden, you have it there, all there in that story.

[9 : 48] Adam and Eve were put out of the Garden. They were declared to be aliens. They were declared to be unfit for the presence and for the communion of God.

This past week, we've seen some Iranians deported from this country. They're not wanted. And that, in a very solemn sense, is what happened when Adam was put out of the Garden.

He was deported. God, of course, in order to be consistent with His holiness, could not tolerate rebellion. God is love, yes, but God is also justice.

God is just. God is holy. And so, men and women were declared to be aliens. People who don't belong in the presence of God.

And that's exactly what an alien is. An alien is someone who doesn't belong in a certain place. And so, men and women have made themselves the enemies of God and as a result, they have been declared to be aliens.

[10 : 59] They have disinherited themselves. They have so rebelled that they no longer belong in the presence of God. And as a result, says Paul, writing to the Ephesians, they are without God and without hope in the world.

Now, Paul says this not in order to indulge in some morbid analysis of the human predicament, but in order to underline the good news which is the gospel.

Writing to the Colossians, he does indeed say that we were alienated and enemies in our mind by wicked works. But he goes on to say, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death.

We now, by faith, can be justified and accepted by God and pardoned and forgiven through the work, through the life, through the death, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Christ. And so through him and through faith in him, we can be called and become the children of God and be at peace with God.

[12 : 15] Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God. Having been put right with God, we have peace. We are at peace with him.

And that is the first dimension, if you like, of peace in the Bible. Peace with God. I wonder, do we know what that peace is tonight?

Or are we still God's enemies? Are we still aliens as far as his presence is concerned? Are we still cut off and shut out?

How God in his mercy and in his grace has opened a way through which we may return? And he's inviting us to come tonight by faith in Jesus Christ. We can be justified, we can be accepted, we can be acquitted by the grace of God through faith.

Faith, trusting Jesus, trusting him as our Lord. The second dimension of peace that is mentioned in the Bible is peace with ourselves.

[13 : 20] God is this beatitude was frequently taken by the early church fathers as referring to those who are at peace with themselves.

One of these early church fathers was Clement of Alexandria who lived at the end of the second century and the early third century and he said that this is a blessing on those who have stilled the incredible battle that goes on in their own souls.

Augustine of North Africa who lived in the latter fourth century and early fifth century declared it to be a blessing on those who have composed and subjected to reason all the motions of their minds and who have tamed their carnal desires.

There is a very real sense in which peace is something which we must discover by the grace of God with ourselves. I think it was William Barclay who said a man is a walking civil war.

All of us are walking civil wars. We see evidence of this all around us in our society. We see the prevalence of worry and anxiety in our society today.

[14 : 39] We see evidence of what Jesus called the cares of this world and the word that is used there in Mark's gospel to describe, to translate the saying of Jesus is a word which means to divide.

To divide because worries arise from a divided mind and that's why people worry. Because their mind is divided, they can't concentrate on one thing and they go from one thing into another.

They're not able to concentrate and to overcome their fear and their problem. not only is there a prevalence of anxiety, mental anxiety in our society and we see evidence of this in the fantastic amount of tranquilizers which are prescribed by the medical world.

There is also a prevalence of moral weakness in our society. Increasingly as our society moves away from the Christian base which has governed it for centuries and adopts a humanistic secularist outlook.

People are unable to control themselves. Now each generation suffers from an increasing degree of lack of self-control and that's why we have such a massive problem of law and order in our society.

[16 : 01] That's why we've got a massive problem of indiscipline in schools. You can see it, those who work among young people can see it, those who work among adults can see it, an increasing indiscipline in our society.

There's simply not the discipline there that once was because you see the Christian base of our society is being progressively eroded. We are unable to control ourselves.

It is said of Alexander the Great that he conquered the world but was unable to conquer himself. And that is precisely our predicament today through technology, we can conquer the world.

But increasingly it is becoming clear that we are unable to conquer ourselves. 20th century man has become a giant technologically but he's becoming a dwarf morally.

he that is slow to anger is better than the mighty and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.

[17 : 12] Proverbs 16 32 Blessed happy said Jesus are the meek and meekness means to be able to control one's temper for example.

It does not mean that a person who's meek never feels angry but rather he is able to control their temper. Self-control is a fruit of the spirit according to Paul's letter to the Galatians.

And anger is always a good gauge of self-control. All too often we are angry because we lose our temper. Our anger is of the uncontrolled type.

Our anger becomes evidence of a loss of self-control. Like many a person who has controlled a business controlled an army controlled a country controlled an empire and yet on many occasions was unable to control themselves.

And so there is therefore in our society today and in our lives as individuals a chronic inability to control this welter of conflicting emotions within us this divided mind.

[18 : 28] And we need the peace of God. We need that quality of peace which Jesus Christ came to give. Because you see Jesus had that peace and he died to purchase it for us upon the cross.

peace and peace of Christ rule in your hearts. Literally let the peace of Christ be the referee of his divided hearts.

This civil war that is within you let the peace of Christ rule there and the peace of Christ can rule there. Peace with yourself.

God's peace will keep guard over your hearts.

Through Christ Jesus. God's peace shall stand century. God's peace will keep guard over your hearts is what Paul said to the Philippians so that our fears our doubts our harassing cares are kept out.

[19 : 48] Peace with ourselves. Our hearts are restless said Augustine until they find their rest in God.

God blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.

Literally the sons of God. The sons of God or rather the sons of is sometimes used in a figurative sense. It is used as an adjective for example Barnabas is described as the son of consolation that is he was a comforting person he was someone who was able to comfort others and here perhaps a child of God means someone who is like God who is like God they shall be called the children of God reflecting the harmony of God the harmony of father son and holy spirit peace peace with ourselves the peace of God that passes all understanding do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your request to God and the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard most that century over your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus peace and that is the grace that is available in Christ now you can be at peace with God without knowing the peace of God once you are at peace with God then you are justified forever that this peace of God this peace with yourself is a peace which you can lose a peace which you need to cultivate a peace which you need by the grace of God to renew day by day and that's why Paul says we must in everything with prayer and petition and thanksgiving present our requests to God we must bring our requests to God and not allow worry and panic to overcome us and to confuse us and to get us all mixed up because in this way

Satan can drive a wedge between us and Christ the third dimension of peace that is mentioned in the Bible is peace with others peace with others peace Paul wrote to the Ephesians the following words for he himself is our peace who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations his purpose was to create in himself one new man out of two thus making peace and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross by which he put to death their hostility he came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near for through him we both have access to the father by one spirit in verse 15 we read that he abolished the enmity he abolished he slew the enmity between man and man as we are reconciled to

[23 : 40] God so we become reconciled to one another now this message that Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians is of tremendous significance in the divided world in which we live a world which is divided by iron and bamboo curtains a world which is divided by religious and racial and social discrimination a world which is divided by two sides of industry a world which is divided

politically ideologically we live in a world which is split right down the middle again and again and yet again Paul tells us that if someone who might be a Marxist out and out and who has preached hatred against the capitalists is reconciled to God and the capitalist millionaire against whom he raged is also converted and who prior to his conversion sought to all that he could to spread it and to undermine and to eliminate that

Marxist rebel when these two men or two people are converted they become brothers and that this middle wall of partition this middle wall of enmity is broken down and whereas before they were enemies they now become brothers that does not mean that the social concern of the Marxist disappears it does not mean that the business pursuit of the capitalist is abandoned but that there is a new brotherhood in Christ the hatred the bitterness is taken away now we see this in the New Testament the New Testament world was one of religious and racial discrimination to a significant degree first of all there was religious discrimination between Jew and Greek the Jew for example regarded the Greek as being unclean the ordinary form of the morning prayer a Jew thanked God that God had not made him a Gentile a slave or a woman the Jews didn't mind if the money changers used the part of the temple they did because it was the court of the Gentiles it was the court for the Gentile converts to Judaism and therefore they were second class citizens or even third class citizens anyway so it didn't matter there was racial discrimination also between the Greeks on the one hand and the barbarians on the other the barbarians were the people who didn't speak Greek they were looked down upon by the Greeks anyone who didn't speak Greek was simply not completely a person as far as the Greeks were concerned they were regarded as unlearned and as ignorant there was this sense of innate superiority on religious racial and linguistic grounds and these divisions are no less real today they are in fact erupting in our own society and throughout the world perhaps this is the greatest test the greatest practical test that Christianity faces in the world today if we face a divided world can the church demonstrate that the gospel bridges the gap in the Bible study last Wednesday we were looking at Paul's the opening verses of Paul's letter to the Philippines and Paul says there that he was in chains it is right for me he says to feel this way about all of you since I have you in my heart whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel Paul was concerned not simply to defend the gospel not simply to preach it but also to confirm it to live it out and you see it's not sufficient to have people who can preach it is not sufficient to have people who can capture the media it is not sufficient to have people to have the Billy Grahams of this world I just heard the other day of a great evangelistic campaign in Korea and they held it in a vast park and 2.7 million people came believed to be the largest meeting ever a religious meeting ever 2.7 million and then they had a prayer meeting all night afterwards and 1 million stayed for the prayer meeting absolutely fantastic but you see that in itself is not enough it's not enough to reach the crowds it's not enough to be able to use the media important as that is the message must be preached it must be defended but it also must be confirmed it must be shown to work it must be demonstrated and that's where we fall short in the church of Jesus Christ today Paul said that he defended the gospel and he confirmed the gospel and the way in which you and I will confirm the gospel is being at peace with one another and demonstrating that in the church of Jesus Christ the divisions of the world don't count and they don't matter but there are social distinctions perhaps less in our society than many there are cultural distinctions there are linguistic distinctions their ideological distinctions and somehow or other by the grace of God we have to overcome these and demonstrate that in the church a person is what he is before God and he's not anything else he's not seen first of all as black or white he's not seen first of all as upper or middle or lower class he's seen as a

[30 : 03] Christian he's seen as a person of God is accepted and therefore he is accepted with open arms by all of us in such a situation the church is called upon to be a reconciling community it surely can fulfill this duty only as we who are its members are reconciled to God ourselves and renew that reconciliation by communion with him day by day and secondly as we are reconciled with one another this in this the church was successful in the early centuries Paul could say to the Colossians there is neither Greek nor Jew circumcision or uncircumcision barbarian Scythian bond or free man but Christ is all and in all a slave in the ancient world was looked down upon he was despised a slave had no civil rights a slave was the property of someone else some ancient philosophers in fact said and this was popularly believed that a slave was simply a tool a human tool but when a slave became a Christian that slave was accepted as a person in the church they didn't have one church for slaves and another church for masters they both came together and in

fact there is at least one church in the second century in record where the bishop or the minister of the church was a slave and that was something completely revolutionary in the world at that time but all too often within the reconciling community there are people who are at enmity and this was a problem too in the early church as we saw in chapter four of Paul's letter to the

Philippians I plead he said with Yodi and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the law an unwillingness to agree an unwillingness to be reconciled the one to the other how can we correct this how can we thereby help the church to fulfill its reconciling mission how can we thus confirm the gospel how can we become like God well let us ask the question how did God deal with his enemies he loved them he demonstrated his practical kindness for them so must we people that we feel that we don't get on with people with whom between whom between whom and us there is enmity we must remember what God has done God has forgiven God did not wait for us to put our house in order

God took the initiative and God forgave us while we were still sinners Christ died for us and that surely is the secret of reconciliation it's not a question of waiting for the other person to take the initiative it's a question of taking it ourselves by the grace of God thanking God that he has put us right with himself and going expressing forgiveness to the person against whom we have felt enmity and so we are called upon to be peacemakers peace we are called upon to make peace in this sense to make peace one with the other to make peace in a world that is divided to make peace in a world which is bigoted and full of hatred to make peace and this peace can be made not by compromising the Christian gospel not by watering it down until nothing remains that is distinctive we can indeed proclaim the gospel in all its power and in all its fullness and at the same time be peacemakers a willingness to forgive a willingness to confirm the gospel a willingness to demonstrate in the church what it means to be a community of peace and that is I believe the greatest challenge that is facing the church of

Jesus Christ today to be a community of peacemakers we live in a divided society and all too often the church reflects the divisions of society and we need by the grace of God to ask him for the strength for the courage for the vision to overcome these divisions so that we are knit together in love and that we although we may come from different backgrounds yet in Christ we find one another and so in a very real sense every congregation of the church should reflect a cross section of society there's something wrong when the church reflects only one section of society we need congregations which reflect all sections of society and all the tensions which these sections of society feel are resolved and reconciled in the church and so the gospel is confirmed the power of the gospel is demonstrated it is demonstrated in the church that men and women can be brought together that men and women can love one another and that's surely what the world needs to see let me repeat again we could capture the media we're a long way from doing it but let us all means seek to do it but even if we succeeded in capturing the media of this country that would not in and of itself guarantee a revival and a reformation we need to demonstrate as well as to declare the gospel of Jesus

Christ and that is the responsibility of all of us who name his name and who seek to do his will I wonder how willing are we that our congregation should become a demonstration of the power of the gospel how willing are we to share with others and to accept one another for the only reason that God has accepted us now there are Christian people who come from different backgrounds who have different outlooks belong to different races who have different psychologies if you like who smell differently from us and we say we don't like them and you and I have got to get over that problem because if these people have been accepted by God whatever the background they come from however they may see things in life which are not of the essence of the faith if God has accepted them then you and I must accept them too

[37 : 36] God has accepted them as they are God has accepted them in spite of what they are so also must you so also must I and that is the greatest challenge I repeat that is facing the church in our generation today to demonstrate that the walls of partition come tumbling down in the church of Jesus Christ not by waving a wand but by sacrifice by commitment by dedication by love and tactical kindness in your life and in mine peace but we cannot do this unless we are at peace with God and at peace with ourselves only then we will become peacemakers in our society I wonder will the day ever come pray God that it will in this country when the church of

Jesus Christ will be noted by the government to be a peacemaker I've told you before on several occasions how during the rule the government of Nikita Khrushchev in the Soviet Union an

investigation was set up why Baptist churches in the Soviet Union were growing and one of the four reasons that were produced in that government report were that the Baptists the evangelical Christians of the Soviet Union were peacemakers in their factories peacemakers in their communities and this is there in an official report made the Communist Party in the Soviet Union the church is growing I read the other day that there are half a million evangelical believers in the Ukraine alone in the Soviet Union the church is growing because it is demonstrating to the people of Soviet Russia that the gospel works that the gospel can produce the new man the new woman that communism has so far failed to produce and until you and I by the grace of God can do the same our generation is unlikely to believe and the church will continue to be dismissed as an anachronism in the last quarter of the 20th century may God grant that we may catch the vision tonight of what it means to be a peacemaker and ask God to give us the power to demonstrate his peace in all our relationships here and in the world Amen Psalm 72 the 72nd Psalm at verse 7 the tune is Barrow number 30 the just shall flourish in his days and prosper in his reign he shall while doth the moon endure abundant peace maintain let us sing from verse 7 to the end of verse marked 12 six dances of Psalm 72 to the tune Barrow the just shall flourish in his days the just shall flourish in his days and after his days he shall shall not about the increased verse His dominion shall from teeth to teeth extend.

He laid from the rivers of each port unto a flock most end.

[42 : 04] May in the will, Lord, stand up from down before Him us.

And may not our His enemies shall make the very dust.

The kings of Christ is on the earth, to which the presence brings.

And unto Him shall overbears, seek us and seek us King.

Yea, of the mighty things on earth, before Him down shall fall.

[43 : 11] And of the nations of the world, whose service to Him shall.

For even He shall present, when He who gave the call.

No, Lord, O soul, and in that hand, no help of that hand.

Amen. We thank Thee, O God, that the Lord Jesus Christ has brought peace. Peace with Thee.

Peace with ourselves. Peace with one another. Grant, O God, that we may receive that peace tonight. And in turn become peacemakers in our fellowship and in our society.

[44 : 19] We need Thy grace, O God, for this. For here, as in all else, without Thee, we can do nothing. Grant, O God, that Thou wilt give us a burning concern.

To see Thy peace being demonstrated in the world in which we live. Give us a burning concern to become peacemakers. Help us, O Lord, our God, thus to be called children of God.

And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all evermore. Amen.

Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[45 : 28] Amen.