

## Blessed are the Peacemakers

From the Series, "The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe"

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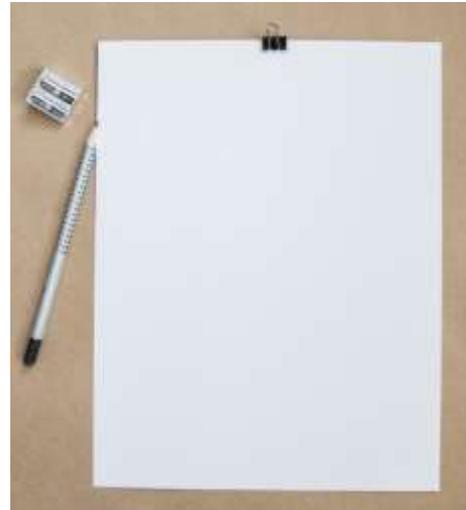
### Introduction

We're going to start today with a quiz. A history quiz, to be exact. The quiz only has one question. Here it is: You and some friends decide that you want to watch a play. You're told that there is a play in town that has the following themes:

- It is anti-war.
- It talks about women's issues.
- It demonstrates concern for the environment.

This sounds interesting, so you and your friends decide to watch. Question: What year is it?

- a. This year
- b. 1965
- c. 1865
- d. 411 B.C.



You get bonus points if you can correctly name the play. Now is the time we play the theme music from the television show, "Jeopardy". OK. Time's up.

If you guessed, "This year", you missed it. I do not believe that there are any current plays this year that match all those qualities.

If you guessed 1965, you were again incorrect. In 1967 the Broadway musical "Hair" was released, but that's two years off. You get honorable mention for being close if you guessed that.

If you guessed 1865, you were again wrong. The only play of note that year had the title, "My American Cousin." It played in the Ford Theater in Washington D.C. The play didn't have any qualities to make it remembered outside of the year it was presented. However, it was the play that Abraham Lincoln watched with his wife on the night he was assassinated.

That leaves us with the year 411 B.C. In that year, the ancient Greek playwright Aristophanes produced a play entitled, "Lysistrata". It has all the themes we mentioned.



*Peloponnesian War*

Concerning War: This play was written to criticize the Peloponnesian war. That was a war between the city of Sparta (where the Spartans lived) and Athens. The war was very controversial because it involved heavy loss of both life and money. In one battle, Athens attacked the Spartans with a massive expeditionary force. It included 200 ships and thousands of soldiers. The Spartans won, destroying the entire Athenian force. So, Aristophanes wrote to protest the idea of war, especially ill-conceived and poorly executed wars.

How about the environment? In order to build ships and other instruments of war, the Greeks destroyed the forests on entire mountains. When you chop down all the trees on a mountain, you remove everything that holds the soil in place. So, actions like this are followed by landslides that can destroy entire towns. On top of that, the forests don't grow back during the lifetimes of those who once enjoyed them – if ever. So, society at the time was concerned for the environment.

How does this play suggest that war, with its terrible toll on humans and the environment, be dealt with? To make things complex, this play was a comedy. How can you write a comedy about war? Well, in this play, a leading woman of Athens calls a meeting of all the other women.

The leader's name was Lysistrata. She says the war needs to end. The women say, "Well, what can we do? We don't have any power." Lysistrata has an answer to this. She gets all the women of the region to take an oath stating that they will refuse to have any contact with their husbands until the men can get their act together and negotiate peace. Does it work? You'll have to get a good book on ancient Greek drama to find out. I was a theater major in college, so I had to read about things like this.

So, as early as 411 B.C., people were concerned about war, the environment, and women's issues. We tend to think that our generation is the only one to be concerned about these things.

In coming sessions, we can talk about things like women's issues and the environment, among other things. For now, let's focus on war.

I ran into some material from the New York Times recently. The material is old, published in July of 2003. It was reprinted material from a book entitled, "What Every Person Should Know About War" By a man named Chris Hedges.

Here are some statistics from that book:

Q: What is a war?

A: War is defined as an active conflict that has claimed more than 1,000 lives.

Q: Has the world ever been at peace?

A: Of the past 3,400 years, humans have been entirely at peace for 268 of them, or just 8 percent of recorded history.

Q: How many people have died in war?

A: At least 108 million people were killed in wars in the twentieth century. Estimates for the total number killed in wars throughout all of human history range from 150 million to 1 billion.

(From the New York Times web site, accessed 6/27/2020)

So, from the time that historians have been tracking the human race, the world has only been at peace 8 percent of the time. Tens of millions, if not hundreds of millions have died. Peace, at least peace as it relates to war, seems to be elusive for humans.

Why?

We're in a section of Matthew's Gospel account that I'm calling the "Christian Manifesto", which covers chapters 5 through 7 of the book. In this "Christian Manifesto", we're learning things that are vital for disciples of Jesus Christ.

Let's read once again what we've learned so far:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.  
Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.  
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.  
Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.  
Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.  
(Matthew 5:3-8).

And our passage for today:

Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.  
(Matthew 5:9. Some translations say “sons” of God).

We'll base our discussion today around some questions:

- I. What is Peace?
- II. Who are the Participants in Peace?
  - A. Peace with God.
  - B. Peace with Ourselves.
  - C. Peace with Others.

## **I. What is Peace?**

Peace has two aspects. First, the standard, dry dictionary definition would say that peace means “freedom from conflict”.

Then, we have to ask, “What is conflict”? Conflict means you have things working against each other. They might be pulling. They might be pushing. Sometimes, things around us pull or push hard. Sometimes the force is so strong that something breaks. When people are in conflict, sometimes the conflict becomes so strong that someone gets hurt. When this happens, we start to talk about fighting. When fighting break out, you get a sense that one party wants the other to get hurt. As the willingness to hurt others grows, we start using words like “battles” and “wars”

So, we can think of peace in a practical sense. Peace is a state where we're not concerned that someone wants to hurt us or take things from us. We are free from conflict, from battles, and from wars.

Here's where we move to the second type of peace. The Hebrew people have a word, “Shalom”. Shalom in its most basic use means “peace”. But it's more. When you experience a state where no one wants to hurt you, you're free to enjoy life. You're free to heal from the injury of conflict. You can become whole. You're can grow. You're free to become prosperous and happy.

Of course, it's the Hebrew way of looking at this that caused Jesus to use the word. So, he told his disciples that people who make peace, who make shalom, are blessed.

## II. The parties involved in peace

As we've been developing this idea of peace, we're suggesting that conflict involves individuals or groups. Peace means that individuals and groups find ways to avoid or end conflict. So, we ask: When Jesus talked about peace, who are the individuals or groups involved? Let's look at a few.

### A. Peace with God.

By far, the most important kind of peace that anyone can get is peace with God. If you were to ask, "What part of the Christian faith is hardest to get people to understand in today's world?", I think this would rank among the hardest.

I've mentioned in recent messages that there is a passage of Scripture that we should all become familiar with. Here it is again:

Why do the nations conspire  
and the peoples plot in vain?  
The kings of the earth rise up  
and the rulers band together  
against the Lord and against his anointed, saying,  
"Let us break their chains  
and throw off their shackles."

(Psalm 2:1-3)

This psalm tells us that the "kings of the earth" are banding together to throw the rightful king of the universe off his throne.

Who is the rightful king: God

Sing praises to God, sing praises;  
sing praises to our King, sing praises.  
For God is the King of all the earth;  
sing to him a psalm of praise.

(Psalm 47:6-7)

In the modern western world, we don't understand kings, much less kings with all power. We vote for our leaders. If we don't like our leaders, supposedly, we vote them out. In the ancient world, that was not how it worked with kings. Kings had great power. He (or she if it was a queen) had the power of life and death, peace or war.

One of the most powerful kings of the ancient world was a man named Xerxes. He was the Babylonian King who took a Jewish woman named Esther for his wife. You can read about him in the book of Esther. He was so strict, that anyone who walked into his court uninvited could

be killed. It didn't matter if you were a trusted advisor or even family. Walking into his courtroom uninvited could result in a death penalty.

Here's something to think about: Most of the kings of our world, whether ancient or modern, rose to power in mysterious ways. Somehow, their families got put in charge of things. Most times, no one today knows why.

On the other hand, there is one King who is the rightful King of the whole world and the whole universe. That's because he made our whole planet and the universe. He started out as the King, he is the King, and he always will be the King. This King graciously allows us to live on what he created.

So, when local groups of people have a king, that's a king with a small "k". No matter how much power they have in their kingdom, they should still submit to the one true king of the world and of the universe. Sadly, we're told that most of them don't.

In the ancient world, if someone decided they didn't like the king, they had three choices:

- Obey the king anyway.
- Leave.
- Start a revolt.

Choice number three, revolt, was very dangerous. Most kings didn't give up their kingdoms easily. Declaring a revolt was an act of war against the king. If you did that, the king had the authority to use whatever force he felt was necessary to squash the rebellion. We probably don't know about most of the rebellions that have taken place in human history. That's because most rebellions fail. The participants in the rebellions wind up in prisons, torture chambers, or dead by very painful means.

In the time of Jesus, the most powerful force in the world was the Romans. If someone declared a revolt against Rome, the Romans came in with the best trained and best equipped soldiers in the world. They used all necessary force to squash the rebellion. Then, they invented one of the most torturous forms of execution ever devised by mankind: Crucifixion. When Jesus lived in Israel, it was not uncommon to walk down a road and see rebels and criminals on crosses by the road. They were put on display for all to see. So, the average resident of Israel in those days knew all about what happened when people attempted a revolt.

So, when the worldly rulers of any age start a revolt against the one true King, he has the authority to use whatever power he feels is necessary to squash the revolt. Here's an important question: ***Why is this hard for people to understand?***

This is hard for us to understand because the true King of the universe is very patient.

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. (II Peter 3:9)

When we look out the window, we see flowers and trees. We see blue skies. We turn on the television and see people who seem to be friends. We have fun with them. They teach us things. They play music. They make us laugh. There's no sign of a world at war against God anywhere on TV.

But the Bible warns us that everything we see around us is an illusion. Our world is at war with the rightful King. Here's something more to think about: ***Most of the people you see on TV are participants in the rebellion.*** Because of this, one day, the king will send his armies, and he will use all force necessary to cleanse the earth.

We just read a verse from II Peter. Let's read on:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. (II Peter 3:10)

On that day, there will be a terrifying penalty for all those who participated in the rebellion. The Romans, as powerful as they were, were only one of many sets of rulers to govern the real estate known as planet earth. They had crucifixion. Here is the penalty for those who rebel against God:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15)

***This is why the number one thing that any person needs in their life is peace with God.***

The world is in rebellion. Someday God will bring his armies to squash the rebellion. Those who participated in the rebellion will be thrown into the lake of fire.

So, how do you make peace with God?

Fortunately, we don't have to figure it out. God offers it to us. We make peace through the Son.

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through 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 things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation. (Colossians 1:15-22)

We read every Christmas that when Jesus was born, the angels pronounced the following words: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests. (Luke 2:14)"

The rightful king of the universe could respond to a rebellion by killing everyone on the earth. Instead, he sent his Son Jesus as an ambassador of peace. It is through his blood, shed on the cross, that Jesus reconciles us to God.

So, when we accept the sacrifice of Jesus, we accept peace with God. This is important: The act of confessing our sin involves saying, "I have participated in the revolt against you, God. God, I want to leave the rebellion and join your side. I want to make you my king. Please forgive my sin and rebellion through your Son, Jesus Christ".

On that day, when we make peace with God, we start our life as peace makers. When we do that, God offers an important reward.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (Matthew 5:9)

Peacemakers, people who make accept peace from God, become God's children. When we accept the sacrifice of Jesus, when we accept God's offer of peace, he doesn't just say "thank you" and leave us. He adopts us into his family.

In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ... (Ephesians 1:4(b)-5)

In this environment of family, we have the biggest conflict in the universe removed from our life. We said in the introduction that when conflict is removed, that's when we experience the

kind of peace implied by the word “Shalom”. We have wholeness, and the foundation of eternal happiness.

So, having learned all that, we move on to the next question: Who are the other participants in peace?

## **B. Peace with Ourselves**

Once we have peace between God and us, God offers us a deeper, personal peace. We can have peace with ourselves. The apostle Paul wrote about it in his letter to the Philippians.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4-7)

So, here we have a picture. Someone has accepted the offer of peace from Jesus Christ. - But it’s not working in a practical way. They have anxiety. In verse 6 of the passage we just read, Paul says, “Do not be anxious about anything...” So, Paul must be responding to someone who was anxious. To have anxiety means you don’t have peace within yourself. You have conflict inside of your person. How does this happen? Why are people anxious?

They’re anxious because they believe there are things they need to be happy. We’ve been calling those things, “the idols”. Those things, they believe, are in danger. And so, those people become afraid. We spoke earlier about conflict. Forces around us are pushing and pulling against each other. In this case, the forces are pulling things away from us. The things we think we need to be happy. And so, we worry. We become anxious. We have no peace.

The answer is to honor and glorify God. Paul tells us we must understand how much God loves us and rejoice in God and his love. God loves you, and he wants to take care of you. He wants to provide everything you need and protect you. He has the power to do it.

“Rejoice in the Lord”, Paul says. Rejoice always. “Do not be anxious about anything”, Paul says, “but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

Are you concerned that you won’t have something you need? Ask god to help. Ask God to provide the things you really need. If you will do this, Paul tells us “...the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Once you have received peace with God, God helps us to have peace with ourselves. And now we move on to the final participants in peace.

### **C. Peace with Others**

Earlier, I said that Peace with God hard for people to understand. It's hard, because the whole world is at war with God.

We started our discussion today with the question of war. The wars we discussed were wars between people. As we said, the world has only been at peace, meaning there weren't any official wars, for 8 percent of its history.

So, what's the answer? In particular, what is the answer that God offers to the world? I'm afraid this is where things get hardest of all.

You see, God offers us an answer to war - The wars that have plagued the human race for thousands of years. In fact, God offers us something more. It's not just a solution to war. God offers us a solution to all human conflict. He offers us a solution to hatred. He offers us a solution to the spiritual children of hatred, which include tragic things like racism.

But there's a challenge: The answer is hard. At least, it's hard emotionally for most people. You see, to understand the solution, you must understand the problem.

The problem is sin.

Listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah:

...the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked." (Isaiah 57:20-21)

As long as there are wicked people in the world, there will never be peace. God says that when people reject him, they become evil. They become like water in a storm that stirs up mud. As long as there is a storm, the water will never be clear. As long as there is sin, there will never be peace.

***Before you can understand the solution, you must understand the problem. The problem is sin.***

Before moving on, let's make something clear. Am I saying that the victims of hatred and violence are victims because of their sin? No. One of the problems of sin is that it's irrational. When Cain Killed able thousands of years ago, a wicked man killed a good man. The fact that sin is irrational is all the more reason to understand the problem.

So here's the solution. The solution does not start with nations. The solution does not start with programs. The solution does not start with other people. ***The solution is to start with individual human hearts. The answer starts with you, my friends.*** You must seek peace with God. You must seek to have peace with yourself. Then and only then can you offer any peace to the world. You see, according to the Bible, the world will never be completely at peace until wicked people either make peace with God, or until the wicked are eliminated.

Because God is merciful and gracious, the world has seen pockets of peace. The world has seen something like an oasis in the midst of the desert. When you accept Christ as your savior, when you accept the peace that God offers to you through Jesus, you become a potential oasis. Jesus is the answer. You must come to the point where you realize this. You must become a disciple. You must come to the point where you value Jesus more than anything.

Hear what he has to say about world peace:

Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven. Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law - a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 10:32-29)

We must come to believe that Jesus is the answer. Then, we can offer Jesus to others, so they can have peace, too.

Let's pull this all together.

## **Conclusion**

We started by talking about the problem of war. War has been around a long time. Hatred, and all the things that go with it have also been around a long time. The disciples of Jesus are told that they can be peacemakers. To be a peacemaker, you must do several things.

You must accept the peace that God offers through Jesus Christ. That means coming to the points of realizing that the whole world is at war with God, and you have participated in the rebellion. You must confess your sin and your rebellion and ask God to forgive you through the blood of Christ. If you do this, you have peace with God.

From there, you learn to accept peace on a personal level. You learn to have peace with yourself.

Then we can consider others. The world doesn't understand what's going on. They're trying to kick God off his throne. Because they don't understand the problem, they will never completely see peace. War, hatred, racism, and a host of other evils are the children of sin. This is the dilemma: The world wants peace, but they want peace without God. As long as they don't want God, they will never see peace.

Once we understand the true path to peace with God, we can offer it to others. We can share Christ with others. If they are willing, others can receive Christ. Then, they will have peace.

Let's close with a well-known passage from the prophet Isaiah:

How beautiful on the mountains  
are the feet of those who bring good news,  
who proclaim peace,  
who bring good tidings,  
who proclaim salvation,  
who say to Zion,  
"Your God reigns!"

(Isaiah 52:7)

Yes, our God reigns.

There is only one true God. There is only one true King. Accept God as your King, and you will have peace. Tell others that he is the true King, and that he offers peace to any who accept him through his Son, Jesus Christ. Become a disciple of Jesus. Become a peacemaker. And then the words we studied will be true of you: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

