

Blessed are the Peacemakers, Part 2

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

By Phil Brainerd

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Introduction

Many people have heard of the TV show, "Jeopardy". It's a big trivia quiz game. But it's got a twist. In most trivia games, the person running the game asks questions, and the players give the answers. Jeopardy is different, because the host, usually Alex Trebek, gives the answer, and the players ask a question that matches the answer.

So, a player looks at a big board full of topics. Let's say one is music. The player says, "I'll take music for \$200." The answer is, "This man wrote Beethoven's Fifth Symphony." If a player thinks they have the answer, they push a beeper. (beep beep) If they beep first, they ask, "Who was Ludwig von Beethoven?"



I want you to imagine that you're watching the game one night. The board turns on.

Every answer on the board is "Jesus".

Player: Let's take Jesus and music for \$200.

Host: This man's faith in Jesus inspired him to write church music that. His music is considered some of the finest in the Baroque period and is studied by music students to this day.

Player: Who was Johann Sebastian Bach?

Player: Jesus and Science for \$200.

Host: This scientist had a faith in Jesus so strong he memorized the Bible at the age of 14 before discovering equations to describe the relationship between forces of electricity and magnetism.

Player: Who was James Clerk Maxwell?

Player: Jesus and Science for \$400.

Host: This African American scientist had a faith in Jesus that led him to be an evangelist when he wasn't discovering new ways to help farmers feed a hungry world.

Player: Who was George Washington Carver?

Player: Let's try Jesus and civil rights for \$200.

Host: This civil rights leader had a faith in Jesus that led him to serve as an ordained preacher for the newly formed African Methodist Episcopal Church while advising Abraham Lincoln on how to improve life for people of African descent.

Player: Who was Frederick Douglass?"

Player: Jesus and civil rights for \$400.

Host: This civil rights leader had a faith in Jesus that led him to study at seminary before advising President Theodore Roosevelt. In fact, he was the first African man invited to the white house for dinner by President Roosevelt.

Player: Who was Booker T. Washington?

Player: Jesus and civil rights for \$600.

Host: This civil rights leader came from a family with such a strong faith in Jesus that his father was named after the great protestant reformer, Martin Luther.

Player: Who was Martin Luther King, Jr.?

It's not hard to imagine a game where Jesus is the answer to everything. You know why?

Because Jesus is the answer to everything.

Followers of Jesus like Johann Sebastian Bach were inspired to write some of the most beautiful and enduring pieces of music in history. Scientists like Isaac Newton, the father of Gravity and Calculus, Joseph Keppler, one of the fathers of Astronomy, James Maxwell, father of modern electrical theory, George Washington Carver, the brilliant African- American who discovered amazing innovations in agriculture, all found inspiration in Jesus. Great civil rights leaders like Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and Martin Luther King, Jr., all found inspiration from Jesus.

Whether culture, the arts, science, or relevant topics like civil rights, Jesus is the answer.

We're still in our Series, "The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe". But we're going to take a little detour. We're still in what I'm calling the "Christian Manifesto", chapters 5 through 7 in Matthew's Gospel. We're going to continue looking at the statement of Jesus that we looked at last week.

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

This is the Fourth of July weekend. Normally, we would take a break and talk about something having to do with the revolution or freedom or something related to this holiday. However, we have a statement here in Scripture that relates to things that greatly concern people on this particular holiday.

We're in the middle of a country that's definitely not at peace. How do we think about that? Today we've got a big task. We're going to continue our series while addressing the current challenges facing our nation and while honoring the Fourth of July holiday. In particular, we'll try to address what peacemaking means in light of the racial tensions our country faces. It's a complex topic, so we can't hit on everything. However, we'll to our best to get started.

We're going to build on the outline that we used last week. We started by asking, "What is Peace?" Then we moved on to the participants of peace.

- Peace with God.
- Peace with ourselves.
- Peace with others.

Let's pick up again.

I. What is Peace?

After looking at peace in different ways, last week we settled on the following practical definition of peace:

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.

We then looked at peace in the way that the Hebrew people spoke of it in the word, "Shalom". 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 or conflict. You can become whole. You're can grow. You're free to become prosperous and happy.

Let's expand in this. We mentioned the idea of conflict. Let's ask another question: **How does a peacemaker face conflict?** We'll weave the answer to that into the three main points of our discussion today.

Having said that, let's return to the three participants in peace.

II. the Participants in Peace

A. Peace with God.

The greatest need for all people is peace with God.

1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. (Romans 5:1-2)

19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 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. (Colossians 1:19-20)

Why do we need peace with God? Because the world is at war with God. (Psalm 2)
Because the world has declared war against God, he could choose to wipe out all humanity.
Instead, he offers us peace through Jesus Christ.

Since the world is at war with God, we can apply our question: How does a peacemaker handle conflict with God?

The first step is to accept the peace that God offers to us through Jesus Christ. ***Jesus is the answer to finding peace with God.***

This is important for another reason. When we talk about handling conflict, or handling anything we must understand that we can do nothing of eternal good without Jesus:

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

We are called to do good things in God’s name; to bear much fruit. We should be like a farmer going out into his field and finding loads of fruit on his vines. But we can’t do this without Jesus. He tells us here that he is the vine. Jesus is the answer to solving problems in our world.

To drive this home, Jesus gave his disciples instructions during his time on earth. At one point, he sent out his disciples ahead of him into Israel, and told them this:

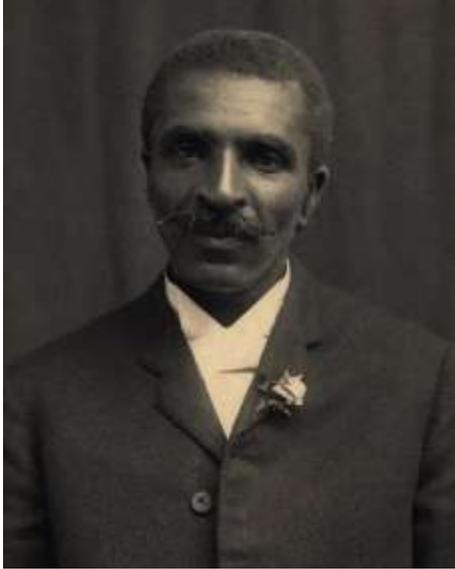
5 “When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ 6 If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you...” (Luke 10:5-6)

So, Jesus told his disciples that they must first find peace with God. Then, they were to seek out others who wanted that peace, and who wanted to “promote” that peace. These were the “peace-makers”. I believe these are primarily the ones Jesus was talking about when he said, “Blessed are the Peacemakers.”

To be peacemakers, we must be totally convinced of this. ***We must firmly believe that Jesus is the answer.***

We’ve said that we want to address the issue of racial tension in our country, so let’s look at someone who did this. We’ll look at a man named George Washington Carver. He was born in the 1860s at a time when things were very hard on people of African descent. He was an orphan. With all of this, he had every reason to be bitter towards the United States of America and its dominant European population.

Then, something happened to him at the age of 10. He writes in his own words:



George Washington Carver

“A dear little white boy, one of our neighbors, about my age came by one Saturday morning and in talking and playing, he told me he was going to Sunday school tomorrow morning. I was eager to know what a Sunday school was. He said they sang hymns and prayed. I asked him what prayer was and what they said. I do not remember what he said; only remember that as soon as he left I climbed up into the loft, knelt down by the barrel of corn and prayed as best I could. I do not remember what I said. I only recall that I felt so good that I prayed several times before I quit.”

Maybe that wasn't the classic “sinner's prayer”, Later, he ran into people who helped him to better understand the Christian faith.

With a lot of hard work, he got himself into school and obtained a master's degree in agriculture. Later, he taught science at the Tuskegee institute. He referred to his laboratory there as “God's little workshop”. When he wasn't teaching science, he led Bible studies.

He became a great inventor. In 1941, Time Magazine gave him the title, “Black Leonardo”, referring to another great inventor, Leonardo Da Vinci.

So, this was a man who loved Jesus. What did he have to say about the racial tensions that were even stronger when he lived?

“We are brothers, all of us, no matter what race or color or condition; children of the same Heavenly Father. ***We rise together or we fall together.*** (emphasis mine)”

These are the words of a man who found peace with God. He helped others to find that peace. He was a peacemaker.

B. Peace with ourselves.

We said last week that once we find peace with God, we can then find peace with ourselves. Let's read from Philippians:

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to

God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4-7)

The world is filled with reasons to be anxious. Some of those reasons look to be legitimate, some not so much. Paul said the answer was to rejoice in God.

Let's expand on this. I want to read now from something found in John's Gospel.

12 Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. 3 Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 5 "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." 6 He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. 7 "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. 8 You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me." (John 12:1-8)

what's happening here? Jesus is visiting the home of Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead. Mary had been deeply grieved when she thought she lost her brother. Now, her brother has been brought out of the grave and was sitting at the dinner table. To over-simplify the situation, Mary knew that Jesus was the answer to everything. So, she worshipped him by taking a very costly vile of perfume, worth we're told, about a year's wages. She pours the perfume over the feet of Jesus.

Judas protests. He says the perfume should have been sold and given to the poor. The writer, John, goes to length to say that Judas didn't care at all about the poor. He was a thief who was taking money out of the money bag. Judas in essence is saying, "Forget about all the 'Jesus is the answer' nonsense. You all need to care about the poor!"

I have spoken about the tragedy of Judas at other times. Here was a man who sat at the feet of Jesus for three years. He saw fantastic miracles. But his heart was darkened. So much so that he viewed the earthly ministry of Jesus as a money-making scheme. To protect his scheme, he told a diabolical lie. It was so diabolical, that Jesus himself had to shut it down.

I believe Judas was hoping to do the following: ***He wanted to play upon that fact that most people are not at peace with themselves.*** They're concerned about all kinds of things that might get taken away. Jesus is the answer to that. He can supply all the things we really need.

But the greatest thing we need is peace with God. We need to know that we have the total assurance that we are safe for eternity. Jesus is the answer to that, too. Many of us believe it, ***but not completely.***

Jesus died for your sins. In doing so, he guarantees you complete eternal safety. This is a safety based not on your works or your merit, but on the blood of Jesus Christ. If you're not 100 percent sure of that, you are not at peace with yourself. You live your life in fear. And when you live with such fear, you become vulnerable. ***You become vulnerable to something called "guilt manipulation".***

Imagine the scene that we just read about. Imagine that Jesus was not there. Maybe he stepped out for a minute. Judas starts his rant about the poor.

Let's say one person in the group doesn't feel quite right. He's not sure why - There's just something here that doesn't smell right. So, this person speaks up: "Hey wait, Judas. I think that Mary was worshipping Jesus, so what she did was OK."

Judas answers back with a sneer. "OK, huh? Well, obviously you don't care about the poor. Do you know what it's like to be poor? Do you know they pain of the poor?" The whole room falls for this. The one person who had the courage to speak up gets intimidated. He still doesn't feel right, but he has no answer for Judas.

I call this the Judas principle. There are people in the world who are so evil, so selfish, that they create a scheme. They say they care about the poor. After saying they care about the poor, they get people to give up their hard-earned money. ***Then, the Judases steal some or all that money.***

Are there such people in the world today? ***Yes, and lots of them.***

We're talking about racial tension. How does all this relate? Now we look to another famous civil rights leader named Booker T. Washington.

Booker T. Washington was born the child of a slave. After the emancipation of the slaves, he worked hard to get an education. This involved study at Wayland seminary, a Baptist organization designed to train ministers. So, this man exhibited a strong faith in Jesus. Although trained for the ministry, Booker T. Washington became an educator and eventually an advocate for African Americans around the country. He was the first black man invited to dinner at the white house. He was invited there by President Theodore Roosevelt.



Booker T. Washington

At one point, Booker T. Washington wrote about some challenges that he faced as he worked to heal the nation from the evils of slavery and racism. He wrote about it in 1911 in a book called, "My Larger Education":

"There is another class of coloured people who make a business of keeping the troubles, the wrongs and the hardships of the Negro race before the public. Having learned that they are able to make a living out of their troubles, they have grown into the settled habit of advertising their wrongs – partly because they want sympathy **and partly because it pays (emphasis mine)**. Some of these people do not want the Negro to lose his grievances, because they do not want to lose their jobs."

He goes on:

I am afraid that there is a certain class of race problem solvers who don't want the patient to get well, because as long as the disease holds out they have not only an easy means of making a living, but also an easy medium through which to make themselves prominent before the public.

So, Mr. Washington is saying that way back in 1911, his work of bringing healing to the pain of African Americans was hampered by people who: 1) Just wanted to make money and 2) wanted to be important (this includes politicians).

Now, this is where you say, "wait a minute. Black people in America have been through a lot of painful experiences. Are you saying that there are people who are so crummy, they would use that pain just to make money for themselves? Are you saying that there are politicians who would profit from the pain of African-Americans just to get themselves elected? Are you saying that there are strange people who would manipulate the business of racial strife just so that they can feel important? Could such people exist?

Yes, and lots of them.

Here's how these people work: They come up with all kinds of programs and ideas that are totally counter-productive to bringing racial healing to our nation. When they are challenged, they call the people who challenge them "racist". Many people say that the word 'racist' has become weaponized. It's used to silence anyone who attempts to speak up and disagree with what they see.

This is a shame, because problems like racism do exist. According to Booker T. Washington, one of our biggest problems in solving this problem is what I'm calling the Judases of our world. The Judas principle that was so well described by Booker T. Washington is alive and well today.

This is important: There are legitimate people who care about problems like poverty and racial strife and other things of concern for the human race. There are ways to be involved if you feel that's where God is leading you. Contact me if you would like some ideas and direction:
Pastor@TrinityChurch.org

For now, people need to have peace with themselves. They need to realize that Jesus is the answer. This only happens when you trust Jesus for what you need. If you don't do this, you will feel anxiety. You will have no peace.

And more, personal peace only happens when you believe 100% that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross is sufficient to guarantee you eternal safety. If you don't have this faith, you will live your life in fear. This fear will make you vulnerable to the Judases of the world. Crooks, politicians, and just plain old strange people will use guilt manipulation to get what they want from you.

Now that we know all that, let's move on to the third group.

C. Other People

The third group involves peace with others. As we began this topic last week, we learned something surprising. When Jesus talks about being peacemakers, he's not talking about world peace:

"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. (Matthew 10:34)"

The world lacks peace because the people of this world have removed God from their lives. The world has declared war with God.

The prophet Isaiah spoke to this:

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

As long as there are wicked, sinful people living on the earth, the earth can never be fully at peace.

So, what is the peace we're promoting? To find any peace on earth, people must change sides. Here is a sad, but Biblical fact: All people who don't know Jesus are soldiers for the army of this world. To find peace with God, they must defect. They must accept the peace that God offers, and then become residents of the Kingdom of Heaven. Disciples of Jesus, when they promote peace, are promoting the Kingdom of Heaven. We invite people to join the kingdom.

How does this relate to race? One of the symbols that Jesus used when discussing his kingdom is something he called, “The Feast (or the Table) of Abraham”. Let’s read about it.

I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.
(Matthew 8:11)

Jesus calls us to invite people from all nations and all races, from the east and the west, to join the great feast of Abraham.

But we live on the earth. What are they building? They’re trying to rebuild the tower of Babel.

The tower of Babel was an ancient structure described in Genesis 11. At that time the people of the world were all one. They used their unity to build a structure that would go all the way to the gates of heaven. Then, the builders imagined that they could steal from God.



Tower of Babel

I want us to get these pictures firm in mind in the coming sessions. The kingdom of this world is at war with the true king. They’re trying to build the tower of Babel. The true king offers peace to any who will accept it. He wants people of all nations and all races to enter his kingdom. There they will join in the feast of Abraham.

Having said these things, let me share just a few more thoughts on peace and peacemaking as it relates to the racial tension we face as a nation.

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. 20 On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. (Romans 12:17-20)

The peacemaker doesn’t get what they want through violence and revenge. They promote the Kingdom of God with kindness and love. The apostle Paul, who wrote the passage we just read, finished it with these words: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
(Romans 12:21)

To see someone who took this into account, we'll look at a great civil rights leader, Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King was a Baptist minister who advocated for justice for minorities. What made his advocacy so unique in our world was his condemnation of violence.

“As you press on for justice, be sure to move with dignity and discipline, using only the weapon of love. Let no man pull you so low as to hate him. Always avoid violence. If you succumb to the temptation of using violence in your struggle, unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and desolate night of bitterness, and your chief legacy to the future will be an endless reign of meaningless chaos. (1956)”



Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dr. King would surely not have approved of much of what we're seeing today.

We said that we would tie our discussion to the fourth of July holiday. Dr. King also had some words to say to the United States of America. Our declaration of independence contains the following words: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...” Sadly, that has not been applied to all people.

Here's how Dr. King replied to that in his famous, “I Have a Dream” speech.

“In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.” (I have a dream speech, 1963)

When Dr. King looked at the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States, he saw what he called “Magnificent words.” Yes, there was a problem. The words were not being fairly applied. **But the problem could be fixed.** It was not to be torn apart. It was not to be replaced with something else. The country that produced it was not to be burned down.

That means the celebration we hold on the fourth of July, the celebration that commemorates these great words, are valid and right. This falls in line very well with other great civil rights leaders like Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington. Men who were greatly influenced by our Lord Jesus Christ. To my Christian friends: **Please exercise great caution when you hear people tell you otherwise.**

Sadly, this message has been lost on many today who join the mobs that have been filling our streets in the last few months. Brothers and sisters, it is people like the ones we've featured in our talk today that should be our guides. These are our examples. As we seek to face the

problems of our world, such as racial tension, we should look to the voices of people who are influenced by Jesus Christ.

Here are some names that I've been looking to lately: One is Bob Woodson. You can learn about Bob Woodson at: Woodsoncenter.org. Another is Star Parker. You can learn about her Parker at: UrbanCure.org. There are also people from all races who are decent people, and who want to address this problem. The Billy Graham organization has been working at it for years. I was honored to work with some of their people in the city of Philadelphia back in the 1980s.

Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

We've raised a lot of questions today. For every question, the ultimate answer is Jesus.

The world is at war with God. It is Jesus who gives us Peace with God. We must be fully convinced of this.

Once we understand peace with God, we can pursue peace with ourselves. We must believe that God loves us and that he wants to provide for us and protect us. If we don't fully believe that, we will live with anxiety. We won't have personal peace.

The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is sufficient to keep us safe for all eternity. If we doubt that, we will never have personal peace. We will be vulnerable to the Judases of the world who use guilt manipulation to steal from us and to oppress the very people they say they protect.

From there we can talk about peace with others. This is achieved when we invite people to leave the army of this world, to defect, and to enter the Kingdom of God. There they can join the great feast of Abraham. We've learned that we win the world over with love, not violence.

Jesus is the answer to everything. We've extended our talk today to include individuals who have faced and dealt with racial strife in our country. Men like George Washington Carver, Booker T. Washington, and Martin Luther King, Jr. We've learned that Jesus is the answer to racial strife as much as anything else.

Yes, Jesus is the answer. Let's become his disciples. Let's become peacemakers.

Because Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

