

15th February 2017.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT IV. THE BEATITUDES IV.

Matthew 5:9-12.

For the fourth time, this afternoon, we are studying the Sermon on the Mount, which we have by now understood is foundational teaching. The exclamations of Jesus Christ's manifesto of God's kingdom, a very, very important teaching from the mouth of our Lord. Not just as a sample, but summing up everything. You could say that from verse 3 down through verse 12 you have a summation of what it means to be in the kingdom, what it means to be saved, what it means to be a believer, what it means to know God. It's all wrapped up in these incredible declarations that begin "Blessed are...." Or better as we saw, originally made as "O the blessedness..."

And we come in verse 9 to the subject of peace. which of course, is a main subject throughout the Bible. The Bible opens and closes with peace. When God originally created man and woman and put them in the garden, it was a garden of peace. Then came the fall and peace was interrupted, Peace with God was interrupted. Peace between men was interrupted. Then at the cross Jesus came and brought peace to the heart. Someday Jesus will return and establish a kingdom of peace. And in the ultimate new heaven and new earth we will enjoy eternal peace. So really the story of redemption is the story of peace, peace forfeited, peace regained in the heart, peace regained on the earth, and finally peace regained in the eternal state.

And the reason for all of this is because there's no peace, in the heart. Consequently the world reflects the heart of man. There is no peace to the wicked, and the world is wicked and all men are wicked, deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, Jeremiah said. And because the heart is wicked and knows no peace it simply projects itself into all of its relationships. The world that man creates is a world without peace. It's a world of chaos. It's a world of conflict. It's a world of trouble. It's a world of shattered dreams and hopes and broken relationships. Peacemakers are desperately needed, and they can't come from the world because the world is full of hearts that have no peace, and cannot therefore produce it.

Now God offers the world peacemakers right here in verse 9, "Blessed are the peacemakers."

That indicates that there are such things as peacemakers and they are the ones that shall be called sons of God. The sons of God then are the true peacemakers. If you are a believer you are a peacemaker. If you're a child of God you're a peacemaker. Not if you are an Avenger, or of The Justice league.

Now as we think about what this beatitude means, in the form of questions. Question number one, what is the meaning of peace? When we talk about peace what are we talking about?

I suppose for many people peace could be defined as the absence of a war. Peace could be defined as the absence of conflict. But that really isn't God's definition of peace. God's definition of peace is not the absence of something. Most people would say, "Well, peace means there's no strife, there's no conflict, there's no animosity."

In Scripture peace is not the absence of anything. Peace is the presence of something. It is the presence of all that is blessed, all that is good, all that is fulfilling. When two Jews meet they say "Shalom." They don't mean to say, "May you have no more wars." But rather, "May you enjoy the full satisfaction, the calm, the tranquility that God brings." Peace is a creative force producing goodness and wellbeing. It is not just the absence of something; it is the presence of something. It is -- it is not the absence of conflict, it is the presence of aggressive goodness. Peacemaking doesn't create a vacuum. It isn't just the absence of conflict and the presence of nothing.

The root translation of "shalom", was "Perfect wellbeing, all-necessary good, complete freedom from agitating passions and moral conflicts and spiritual prosperity".

Now there is a kind of worldly peace that is only the evasion of the issue. The kind that probably exists in your home from time to time. It's an uneasy peace. It's a truce and it's produced by the fact that you just won't talk because if you open your mouth you know war will break out. So you just keep your mouth shut and you silently go around while smoldering inside. That's only an evasion of the issue. That's a kind of compromise. Or, you know there is sin in the family. You know there's iniquity that should be confronted but you don't want to confront it because it will blow sky high, so you compromise. You don't stand for the truth. You don't confront the issue. That's a very uneasy truth, that's an evasion of the issue. That's a very dangerous situation, very dangerous because you're only letting the real issue hide itself, a smoldering truce that is very likely to break out in greater conflict, deep heartaches and pain ensuing.

God never tells us to do that. He never tells us to just keep our mouth shut so we can somehow live in a superficial tranquility. No, on the other hand, the Bible kind of peace conquers error, confronts sin and produces a true peace. The Bible kind of peace is the peace that exists after the struggle has been resolved. The greatest peace is not the cold war, the greatest peace comes after the hot war. That's the true peace.

James wrote about what is a true kind of peace in James 3:17. He said, "The wisdom from above is first pure then peaceable." In other words, peace comes from pure truth, pure wisdom. Peace is never sought at the price of truth. Peace is never sought at the price of error. Peace is never sought at the price of sin or unrighteousness. Hebrews 12:14 puts it this way, "Follow peace with all men and holiness." In other words, it's not a true peace because you don't confront sin. It's not a true peace because you don't confront error, you just let it exist in a superficial kind of truce. Follow the peace that is associated with holiness. Follow the peace that is first pure and reflects the wisdom that is from above, the truth.

Well, we want to avoid all needless strife. We don't want to just go around wreaking havoc everywhere. There are times when it is a wise judgment to overlook a transgression. There are times when it is the noblest of things to do to cover a multitude of sins. We don't want to just create strife. Some people are good at that, they can just create strife everywhere and they can do it rather piously in the name of virtue. But we certainly don't want to sacrifice truth. We don't want some kind of peace that is the product of truth sacrificed or the product of compromised righteousness or indifference to spiritual duty. That kind of peace is dishonoring to the Lord, unproductive, superficial and deceptive.

In fact, Jesus said in Matthew 10:34, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword." Before the peace can come the sword has to fall. What was Jesus saying? Well Jesus was saying this...Look, if you're in the house of unbelievers and you're a believer, you realize that as soon as you say I have committed my life to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, you're going to have some instantaneous conflict in your Jewish home." Right?

The confrontation is necessary. The unmasking of sin is necessary. The confrontation of retribution and judgment and the message of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ must be given no matter whether it brings division or not

because the only peace that will satisfy God is that peace that comes after confrontation, bringing about repentance.

We do not abandon truth. We do not abandon doctrine. We do not abandon conviction. We do not abandon principle. We do not cry peace where there is no real peace. In fact, Paul said in 2 Timothy 3 that all who will live godly will suffer persecution. I mean, just living your godly life is disruptive. Living your godly life in your home or your school or your work environment or your neighbourhood in the relationships that are around you is a disruptive reality because you're confronting their sin. But when real peace comes, it comes not because we avoid issues because issues are resolved, conflict is resolved. That's real peace. The real peace that comes when the battle is fought and the battle is over and the truth has prevailed, that's it. The true peace is the peace that occurs when truth prevails. The peace that God is after is the peace that comes to those who agree about the truth of God.

In Luke 12:51 Jesus said, "Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division." Before you can have a true peace you're going to have a disruption. True peace can only come, I say it again, when truth reigns and everybody agrees to that truth.

You know, that isn't how it is today. Most people would say, "Well if you want to have peace, we just have to not disagree. Let's all get together and only discuss what we agree on." That's kind of the thrust of ecumenism;(Universal Church – JCC) let's strip away all the stuff that divides us. Let's get everybody together and let's not talk about what divides us. Jesus never pronounced blessings on apostates who opposed Him. He didn't say, "You know, these Pharisees, they're really very religious guys and we just need to get together with them so that we can have a more united front here in Palestine." True peace is the child of truth. That's the only real peace that God recognizes. The other kind is a false peace, a phony peace because nothing is resolved. What is true and what is righteous is simply ignored. And so we may have to endure temporary trouble in order to bring real peace. That's what Jesus did.

Now would you agree that Jesus was the greatest peacemaker that ever walked? Sure because He came into the world and what kind of peace did He offer us? Peace with God. And was He a disturbing person in society? So disturbing that the whole of the population of Israel basically turned against Him and executed Him. The world would look at Him and say He was anything but a peacemaker, He was the one who troubled like the prophets of old. He was the one who troubled Israel. The same was the case with the Apostle Paul, riots everywhere.

So, biblical peacemakers, are not just quiet, easy-going people who don't want to make issues, who lack any understanding of doctrine, who lack justice or righteousness, who are nice but compromising, who are appeasers. No. In a sense, a true peacemaker will not tolerate the status quo if the status quo dishonours God. He seeks a peace that demands truth. He seeks to bring to light the conflict, to resolve it and gain the victory through the truth. That's the meaning of peace here.

Secondly, what is it that primarily threatens peace? Well, in a word; Sin, sin...whether it is sin in terms of rejection of truth, or sin in terms of conduct. Peace is that peace that is goodness and righteousness. The enemy of that peace is unrighteousness and sin. So in order for there to be a real peace, sin has to be dealt with. Sin in terms of how we think or what we believe, that is error, and sin in terms of how we behave.

Listen to James 3:18, "And the seed...he says...whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace". The seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. Peacemakers sow seeds of righteousness. They confront sin because the only true peace is the peace that is gained when sin has been confronted. There must be a dealing with sin.

So interesting that this morning I read these verses from 13 – 18, to a couple intending to marry but have gotten misunderstandings, and considering it quits! There must be a dealing with sin. And that would be true in your and my life.

Go back to the first beatitude. And here you have the flow of someone coming to God, thus into his Kingdom as it were. First of all, they are coming poor in spirit that means they're bankrupt spiritually. They're overwhelmed with their sin. They realize their iniquity. They realize they are impoverished when it comes to offering God anything commendable, that they have nothing by which to be credited as righteous.

They have nothing by which to gain heaven to earn forgiveness. They come spiritually stripped and barren and bankrupt and destitute.

And secondly, they are mourning over that condition. This is the recognition of sin in an attitude of penitence. Verse 5, the third beatitude, they are meek. Gentle, being a word for meek. They are meek and broken and selfless and humbled.

Verse 6 says they hunger and thirst for righteousness, that is to say they know they don't have it. They are without it and it is what they crave.

They are then beneficiaries of God's mercy in verse 7, and they are purged and cleansed and become the pure in heart. And having become the pure in heart they then become the peacemakers. And now that they are the peacemakers, guess what? Verse 10, "Blessed are those who have been...what?...persecuted." It will always be the case that the true peacemakers will be persecuted because there is something that stands in the way of real peace and they know what that something is and in a word, it is sin. It's the sin of wrong believing and wrong behaving. Only when that sin is confronted and only when that sin is dealt with can someone genuinely bring about true peace. We are to bring then to the trouble hearts of men and women a true peace. Not an uneasy truce, not a false peace, the real thing, even the kind that surpasses human understanding as Phil. 4:7 says.

A peacemaker then is one whose sins have been dealt with in Christ. He has been given a new nature, a pure heart. He has a whole new perspective. He views himself as humbled, as lowly and he comes begging for righteousness which he doesn't have and mercifully is granted that by God's grace. He is therefore because self is not the priority, because self is not important, he is willing to suffer wrong, he is willing to suffer injustice as Jesus did. And that's what verses 10, 11 and 12 tell us. Persecution, insults, all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of Me. Paul the apostle demonstrated that in Acts 20 when he said it really doesn't matter what happens to me, I know that when I get to Jerusalem I've been told that bonds and afflictions await me, none of those things move me. He also said to the Philippians, "I know how to be abased, I know how to abound. I don't really care whether I have everything or nothing. I'm not an issue to me."

Finally here, on asking a third question, and this is a very obvious one as we think about this. Who is the source of peace? We talk about what is the meaning of peace, what is the menace to peace, which is sin. Who is the source of peace? Well we all probably know that it is God. 2Corinthians 13:11, says "Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you." Listen to what it says in 1Corinthians 14:33, "God is not the author of confusion but of peace." God is the author of peace. God is the source of peace. Romans 15:33, "Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen." Only God is the source of peace and peace resides in God as an essential part of His nature.

When God came into the world, the message was? "Peace on earth and goodwill to men. Christ came to bring peace. Ephesians 2:14 says "He Himself is our peace....

So, so very blessed(enjoying enviable happiness, spiritually prosperous – with life-joy and satisfaction in God's favour and salvation, regardless of their outward conditions) are the makers and maintainers of peace, for they shall be called the sons of God![Amp.]

As we have alluded to it earlier, When all of these other realities have found their place in the life of an individual, the result is in verse 9 and then in 10, 11, and 12.....

It is fascinating, and a bit troubling that the believer who lives in the beatitudes will be both a peacemaker and one who creates persecution. You will both make peace and make trouble. The believer is a peacemaker and yet the believer is one who stirs up strife. We saw this even of Jesus, Steven, and Paul, You hear it from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who said that He came as the Prince of Peace to bring peace and then elsewhere said, "I came not to bring peace but a sword." There is this constant ambivalence (coexistence of opposing attitudes), where the believer is, in the world, a peacemaker who is able to make a man at peace with God by the presentation of the Gospel. But on the other hand, where there are those who will not respond to his peacemaking effort, he is a troublemaker, and invariably brings about persecution. John 16:33 says "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world"

After studying the Beatitudes and realizing that they are the characteristics of the man or the woman in God's kingdom, it's easy to feel inadequate. You see the tremendous power and impact of these truths. And this kind of person seems a little too good to be true. You feel like you're looking at somebody on a stained-glass window or you're looking at a plaster saint or something carved out of wood or stone. Certainly there's nobody who lives this way in the reality of day-to-day life, nobody who could fulfill all of these incredible characteristics. But God doesn't deal with stained-glass window saints. I believe that what Jesus presents here in this tremendous introduction to the Sermon on the Mount is no less than the portrait of the believer, no less than the picture of a genuine Christian. And of course it's ideal because God never lowers His standards because man is sinful.

God simply gives that individual Christ so that Christ can work through that individual the meeting of God's standard, by the Holy Spirit.

If you are one who fulfills all of the elements of the Beatitudes, then on those conditions, you enter His kingdom. Maybe you only fulfill them in a very minimal way, but you had to come with a broken spirit, you had to come mourning over sin, you had to come humble before a holy God, you had to come hungry and thirsting for righteousness, you had to come as one seeking mercy and ready to give it, you had to come as one seeking to be purified in your heart, and you had to come as one who desired to make peace with God. And where all of these things were there, however minimally they were there, if they were there in reality, you entered His kingdom, and then God is saying they should bloom within His kingdom and you should progress and grow until they become more than minimal, but rather they become characteristics that are dominant in your life. And where this happens, you'll find that the eighth Beatitude will always happen. Verse 10 says, "Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

In James 1: 2, it says, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing this, that the testing of your faith works patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing." What he's saying there is there's going to be some suffering. There's going to be some trials, there's going to be some testings, and there's going to be some hardships.

In 1Peter 5 :10, it says, "The God of all grace, who has called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you." Invariably in the life of the believer who lives out the Beatitude character, there is going to be a reaction in the world.

All of the virtues that we've seen in this context, all of them summed up, are intolerable to an evil world. The world can't really handle somebody who's poor in spirit because the world lives in a state of pride, in a state of self-promotion and ego-substantiation. The world can't tolerate somebody who is mourning over sinfulness. The world wants to bypass sin altogether and continue to convince itself that it's all right. The world can't tolerate meekness; it honors pride, and the world can't tolerate somebody who knows he's nothing and seeks something that can only be given as a gift. The world says that we have the right to everything because we've earned it.

The world knows little about mercy, the world knows nothing about purity, and the world has never learned how to make peace. And all of these characteristics, when they exist in the believer, as they progressively bloom within his or her life, counter the system. And that's the way it is going to be if you live out the Beatitudes.

In Phil.1:29, it says this: "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." That's just part of it. It is given unto you on the behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him but to suffer for His sake. That's part of it. Now, back up to verse 28 He says, "In nothing be terrified by your adversaries, which is to them an evident token of perdition." In other words, when your adversaries come against you, and they hate the gospel and they hate the Christ in you and they resent the character of kingdom living, when they do that, that is a token of their destiny in perdition. In other words, that's a proof that they're going to hell. But to you it is an evident token of what? Salvation. Isn't that interesting? Whereas the persecution proves that they are going to perdition, the persecution proves that you are redeemed. It is living the redeemed life and seeing the antagonism of a godless world that is evidence that your salvation is genuine.

Christians are now popular and Christians are now famous and Christians are now accepted and Christians are now sort of paraded along and made a part of our society without any hassles at all.

But the issue is not that the world has changed, The issue is we have lowered the standard of righteousness. And we have people claiming to be Christians who don't live enough of a righteous life to give an honest definition of Christianity, or the systems they are engulfed in would spit them right out. The standard hasn't changed, by God's standards, but ours has, and we think the world is just more tolerant, and the fact is we just don't live that kind of life anymore. Oh, we want to be popular, we want to be famous, we want to be acceptable. But if you live the righteous life that God asks you to live and if you live as a true Christian, the world can only resent and hate.

Now, if you want, you can escape. You can go through your whole life and never get persecuted. It's very simple, really. Tell you how to do it. First of all, approve all the world's standards. Fit right in. And then accept the world's morals and the world's ethics. Just join right in. Live like the world lives. Don't tell people they're lost without Jesus Christ. Don't tell people they're doomed to death, and for goodness' sakes, don't talk about hell.

Don't preach and teach that Jesus Christ is the only way and every other system of religion is a lie. Don't separate yourself from the world and all of its activities and all of its enterprises. Go along with the world, laugh at its jokes, enjoy its entertainment, smile when it mocks God, let them take His name in vain, and just be ashamed to take a stand for Christ, and I'll promise you you'll never be persecuted. And then when you're all done doing that, examine yourself to see whether you're in the faith or not because there might be good question whether you really are. Now, you may be a Christian, just living in disobedience.

And may I add this? If you decide to live this way, remember Luke 9:26, where Jesus said this: "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed."

In Luke 6:26, our Lord said this: "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you." Don't ever forget that. When you are popular with everybody, then they don't know the truth about you. You've masked your Christianity or you're not a Christian at all.

Since all of the other Beatitudes previous to this one are inner attitudes, they're all inside attitudes – the Jews had an external religion, and Christ was giving them an internal one. They're all attitudes. This is also an attitude. This is an attitude. It is an attitude of a willingness to be persecuted. That's what He's saying. It is that lack of fear, that lack of shame, that presence of boldness that says, "I will be in this world what Christ would have me be. I will say in this world what Christ will have me say. And if persecution results, let it be." It's that attitude.

Jesus cared to spell out the kind of persecutions those of His Kingdom would suffer to make it clear to them they qualified. So we not only are going to be chased out of the groups we used to be in, we'll be ostracized from the activities that we used to be a part of. Not only that, there are going to be people who are going to speak evil of us, they're going to say things about us, they're going to use unkind words when our name comes up. They did it with Jesus. They said, "Ah, he hangs around with prostitutes and winebibbers," and even called Him Beelzebub.... So if you're going to live the Beatitude life, you've got to be willing to be persecuted and reviled, and there are going to be some people who are going to say unkind things about you. Some people maybe you may care about, too.

Jesus was so honest, that he made this clear in His first sermon, He starts out; "Happy, happy", so happy should you be the first time in, you just want to kind

of smooth the waters. Just let them know how neat it is to be a Christian. Tell them how wonderful” – and I’m telling you, the first thing He ever said set standards so high, they must have fallen flat over on their backs. And then when He gets all done, He says, “And by the way, if you want to live this way, you will be persecuted and chased out of your jobs, your homes, your society. You will find yourself reviled; that is, people will speak vilely and viciously against you, and you will find inevitably that they will say things about you that are not true, they are lies. They are lies. So get ready for that. That’s right. It’s going to happen. It’s inevitable.” Why does it happen? Why does it have to be this way? Why is it that if we live God’s way in this world, why does it have to be this way? Well, that’s the why. Why? Look at verse 10. “Blessed are they who are persecuted for” – what? – “righteousness’ sake.” Look at the end of verse 11, the end of the verse. “For My sake.” The same way He assured the disciples as He left them in John, from chapter 13 – 17.

You know why they persecute you? They really don’t hate you. That’s comforting, isn’t it? They really don’t hate you. Who do they hate? Christ. And it really isn’t you that they resent, it’s the life you live, you see. And our Lord Jesus, in John 15 and John 16, said to His disciples, “Look, if they killed me, they’ll kill you, and if they hate me, they’ll hate you, and if they persecuted me, they’ll persecute you as long as they know that you belong to me.” Jesus revealed holiness in action to an unholy world. And the longer they went and never saw a perfect man, the more self-satisfied they became in their contented sinfulness. There was never a perfect man until Christ showed up.

It happened the way He said it would happen. There’s always a price to pay when to live a kingdom life. But beloved, listen. The fruit of it is forever. For when you give up in this life, you inherit, verse 10 says, the kingdom of heaven. When they take away everything you possess in this world, they’ll never be able to touch everything He’ll give you in the next, you see? Well, this is the Beatitude that sums it up.

Then lastly is the wonderful promise. "Rejoice and be glad when you are persecuted for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." You are in some pretty classy company. That's right. If you're persecuted for the cause of Christ, you're in some pretty good company, as it were for those listed in Hebrews 11.