

Blessed Are 7) The Peacemakers

Matthew 5:9 • 2024-09-22 • Series: The Beatitudes



Peace treaties have shaped history. Did you know the oldest surviving record of an international peace treaty dates back 3300 years? The Treaty of Kadesh was between Rameses II of Egypt and the Hittites. At the time it was called, "The Eternal Treaty." That's a bold title for a peace treaty. A few fragments of earlier treaties have been found. Ancient fragments of peace records between nations like the Elamites and Akkadians date back to the time right after the great flood, 4500 years ago. But where are those peace treaties today? They've long ended or lost their value. "Eternal treaty?" It ends up as only one or two generations and then gone. We've forgotten them and their impact on today is so small. In Europe, after what historians called the greatest conflict in European history, the Thirty Years War came to an end. 400 years ago, this enduring conflict brought an estimated 8 to 12 million deaths. Half the population of Germany perished by famine, plague, or conflict. When the Peace of Westphalia came it had been after decades of war, millions of dead, and two separate treaties that took three years each to resolve. But even after all that strife the Roman pope at the time called the peace treaties "Null, void, immoral, defunct, and unacceptable." So much for pursuing peace. For the most part, we have forgotten old treaties like the Peace of Westphalia. The rise and fall of nations and Empires, two world wars, and a nearly world-ending cold war have a way of doing that. There are many alive today who remember the signing of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty) between President Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev of the USSR. Remember that treaty signing? Maybe not. If you do, the news catches up to you. It ended in 2019 due to China coming onto the scene with nuclear arms and having no interest in joining the terms. Great peacemaking events come and eventually come to an end.

"Blessed are the peacemakers," Jesus said to his disciples. Is there such a thing, a peacemaker? What makes us God's peacemakers if so many peacemakers in history have come and gone and their peace has come and gone? We continue our series looking at the Beatitudes. And today we see just what Jesus means when he tells his disciples, "Blessed are the peacemakers."

The seeds of strife entered this world not long after the seventh day in history had passed. With the terrible knowledge of good and evil came the experience of contending against evil. Cain killed his brother when he could not come to terms with his envy and jealousy. Men like Lamech took their swords and slaughtered their opponents and boasted of powerful threats against their enemies. War between brothers, war within families, and war between nations became the norm. How are God's people supposed to live with all the hostility and warfare? We must understand firstly that God isn't all that interested in offering peace terms with evil. In fact, at the very beginning of time he foretold that there would be hostility between the offspring of Satan (unbelievers) and the offspring of Eve (believers).

There is a false peace that many try to pursue. It is a peace which tries to ignore evil or tolerate what is godless and wicked. Don't be fooled. God isn't interested in those types of peacemakers. The peacemaker who tries to compromise with evil is not a peacemaker from God. Over and over across the pages of Scripture God makes it clear that he desires peace, but not at the expense of what is good and right. When the false prophets tolerated the sexual immorality that foreign nations used to seduce Israel, they still pretended the people were at peace with God. They cried out, "Peace, peace," even as God' judgment hung over them because of their rebellion and stubborn sin. God condemned those false prophets proclaiming peace where there is no peace.

That's why when Jesus spoke of his mission, he had to include the warning that it wouldn't all be rainbows and sunshine. "Do not suppose I have come to bring peace. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." By this he meant that he would not tolerate evil, but rather bring people from the side of evil to his side. As a result, Jesus was bringing division to the world, not mass compromise with the world. What the Lord echoed through Isaiah still stands true for us and our world today, "There is no peace," says the Lord, "for the wicked."

Was there peace for the inhabitants of Canaan who God sent to destroy due to their depraved practices and wickedness? God called for them to be destroyed. Was there peace for the people in the years between the prophet Isaiah's ministry and the prophet Jeremiah? The most wicked king of Judah, Manasseh, was on the throne and Judah's end fate was sealed in God's judgment. Was there ever peace when the people of God united and compromised with evil for the sake of mere outward unity and peace? Once a man anointed by God came against the kings of Israel and Judah. Ahaziah king of Judah thought it was a good idea to unite with Joram, the son of wicked king Ahab. When Jehu rode towards the two kings, they called out to him, "Do you come in peace?" I'm sure they hoped their alliance would bring security and peace. "How can there be peace," Jehu replied, "as long as all the idolatry and witchcraft of your mother Jezebel abound?"

Peacemaking does not involve compromise with evil. It involves doing away with evil. It requires God to act and judge. It requires God looking on every act of evil, every heart and hand in defiance of God's will. And God brings the rebellious heart to an end. And where would that leave us if God dealt with peace by destroying all evil? Where would we be if the only way to peace was the end of all who divide their own hearts with evil, their homes with selfish ambition, and who only seek easy compromise with evil? In both ancient and modern warfare combatants offer no quarter, no peaceful

surrender when they deem their enemy so stubbornly against them it is hopeless to accept their surrender. What about us? Do we deserve quarter from God? Must our God forever contend with our acts of rebellion?

But Jesus did come to provide peace. Not for those who love wickedness, but for those who repent and turn to him. The peace he came to bring the real peace this world needs. We do not need a mere compromise with evil. We need someone to deal with evil. So came the Son of Man. He was prophesied to be the One who would rule over all the earth with everlasting peace. His peace would truly be what none before could ever attain, an eternal peace treaty.

And he didn't secure our peace by coming to terms with evil or giving quarter to evil. He secured our peace by fighting against our real adversary, the devil. He came to crush the devil and destroy his work of sowing destruction and division. He fought for us by stepping into our place and confronting our enemy. He resisted all the devil's temptations. He withstood the devil's traps. And to set us free from all our hostility and warfare he shed his blood on the cross. He brought peace between God and man. He is the mediator of a covenant of peace through his own blood. And he assures us that the warfare is over between us and our God. God our Father sent his Son to reconcile the world back to God. God Almighty brings us from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of his Son who he loves.

Now he sends his disciples as his ambassadors of peace. He sends them with his proclamation and authority, "Preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." He chooses to take people like the apostle Paul who once fought against him. And he enlisted a man like Paul to serve and fight on his side. You also were born fighting against God in your sinful flesh. But he takes you, once an agent of darkness and hostility, and makes you his witness and messenger of peace.

"Blessed are the peacemakers," he tells his disciples. And his assembly of forgiven saints are enlisted to promote peace in a world so lost in the destruction of sin. I read an article in a popular news feed (Forbes) in which the writer was describing the way we are so quick to identify our enemies. He wrote, "Here's how it's done: Write a piece in which you feign outrage and find someone to blame and be sure to take an easy moral high ground while you're at it. It's best if you never once try to understand the other side. The goal is to rile people up, and that's not hard to do on the internet. It's a neat trick."

But that is not how it is with the people of God. Instead of being quick to identify our enemies the people of God are quick to reconcile the lost back to God. They see everyone as a soul for whom Jesus shed his blood. They see each person they encounter as one who needs to be brought out of the grasp of Satan and into the freedom of Christ. They see everyone around them as born in the blindness of sin and needing to be reborn into the kingdom of God through faith in Christ. He sends them to open the eyes of the blind and to release from sins' captivity all who are lost.

And how do they do this? They hold powerful tools as ambassadors of peace. They recognize the power of the gospel to change hearts. They trust the working of the Holy Spirit through that gospel to open hearts and minds to the light of Christ. They boldly and confidently go out into the battle against the spiritual forces of evil, against a world that hates them, and they proclaim the love of God for sinners. They endure hardship, hatred, and persecution as they follow Christ and proclaim his good news.

And they are blessed! In ancient warfare it was not always easy to get reports and updates from the battle. You would watch for a rider or runner who carried the news as they raced to the city. Those who stood on the edge of the city or on its walls would eagerly search for the latest reports from the battle. The prophet Isaiah said that those who bring good news have beautiful feet! They proclaim the victory of God over sin. They proclaim the news that their king who died for them has risen and lives forever. They proclaim the news of peace between God and sinners.

There are some in your life who may not know this peace. They may be living in opposition to it. They might be either clinging to the darkness of sin or hating the light you share. But you are blessed as you live as a peacemaker. It starts as you display your love of peace with God himself. You do well to contemplate the high cost of our lasting peace. Remember it. Live in it. Share it. Treasure it. Defend it. Spread its cause. It is found firstly as you display that peace within God's Church -not by compromising with false teaching, but by loving God's Word. And it continues as you live at peace with brothers and sisters in Christ. Is there a fellow believer who has offended you? How can you remain their enemy when you know that you will be spending eternity with them and share in the same eternal peace treaty of Christ?

And it spreads further as you interact with the unbelieving world around you. As a peacemaker you represent Christ to the world. Christians can at times be known for what they are against. We are against evil things. But we ought to be known mostly for what we are for: we are for reconciliation, forgiveness, and everlasting peace! We are for Christ and his eternal kingdom of peace! Let the world around you hear that and see it in your life. You will be called "children of God."

There is one peace treaty that will last. It is the New Testament found in the blood of Christ. It is the covenant of peace that will never be shaken. It is the promise of Jesus fulfilled, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God." And yes, this covenant is one you can rightly call, "The Eternal Treaty."