

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.Ivor J.W. Oakley (Guisborough Evangelical Church
11-6-2000)

Matthew 5:9-12

(Additional Bible Reading Matthew 10:16-22)

The Peacemaker and the Persecuted

Introduction

Beatitudes need to be seen as a whole, each logically linked to one another. Also reminds us of mountain. First three go up mountain aware of need, humble because of failures and weaknesses, mourning and meek. Then at the summit, asking for God's work in soul, to make him righteous in heart, mind, motives. Then the result – down the other side of the mountain - he becomes merciful, pure in heart, and a peacemaker.

Matthew 5:9 contains one of the great descriptions of the Christian – the peacemaker. One result of Christ's coming to earth was division, **a man against his father, a daughter against her mother** (Matthew 10:35,36). Foes are in our own household. But antagonism must never come from the Christian side. The Christian must be the peacemaker. Not appeasement, anything for a quiet life, let sleeping dogs lie, not easy-going or “nice”. He acts according to principle. Concerned to live holy life and not compromise allegiance to Christ and his will and teaching. But he must not cause personal antagonism. As far as he is concerned, he lives peaceably with all men (Romans 12:18).

Understanding why lack of peace among men

Real reason for antagonism and warfare is the state of the human heart. Our rights. What's in it for me? Touchiness. Our sensitive self-interest. Need for radical change in human nature. New birth. New heart. Leads to new view of self. God now in centre. Self to be forgotten – indeed hated, “crucified”. Sees situation with different eyes. Not protecting own interest. Looks at situation objectively and in light of Bible. God's angle and viewpoint is the measure of right. Not standing on own rights, which are not worth bothering about. His concern is: what will promote God's glory?

Believer as the peacemaker

So Christian man faced up to sin, poor in spirit and meek, moves humbly among men. Watches his tongue and temper. **Quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry** (James 1:19). Passes on no unnecessary gossip which inflames situation (gossip – “we all condemn and all enjoy”). Aware old nature still within. Must be firmly crucified and rejected. It takes two to make a quarrel, but he will not be one of them. He takes initiative in promoting peace, even if it involves apology. Should be friendly and approachable, concerned with God's interests, and God's will in this situation. Uses influence to promote understanding in public and private. By life and lip. Life must be completely taken over and controlled by Holy Spirit to reveal his fruit (Galatians 5:22,23).

Discovers that peacemaking can be painful and costly. Painful to apologise or to rebuke a person if done wrong. Pain of not being able to forgive and be reconciled because no repentance by wrongdoer. No forgiveness if no admission of regret. Painful to listen and rid selves of prejudice while trying to understand different points of view. Pain of being misunderstood and unthanked, but only abused for efforts.

Then he is a peacemaker as he commends the Gospel. Seeing man's efforts to prevent strife and war, he wishes them well and prays for them, but knows success of efforts are limited. People sign peace treaty and quote this text. May have improved situation on surface but not got to heart of matter. Merely throwing chemicals into stream to cure problems, but not going to the source. Source of trouble has fountain and origin in human heart.

The peacemaker realises how relevant the Gospel, and only the Gospel, is in meeting the condition of society and world. He sees the folly of dependence on human efforts and human endeavour.

Men are in wrong relationships with others because in wrong relationship with God. Being reconciled to God leads to us being reconciled to others. So to witness to Christ and explain Gospel, is the highest and best form of peacemaking we can practice. Promoting foundation truths about man, God, Christ's death and Holy Spirit's regeneration.

Peacemaker's description as Child of God.

Now recognition of character of peacemaker, i.e. child of God. Not usually described as that by world. Interestingly, this beatitude is followed by one speaking of persecution for righteousness. The world is more likely to throw stones and rotten eggs than pelt Christian with bouquets of scented roses, according to Alexander MacLaren. But does happen sometime.

Soldier in old Indian army. Prizefighter. Many deeds of valour. Converted through missionary. Became laughing stock. Fellow soldiers did not believe he was peaceful Christian. One day in the mess, someone threw into his face and chest a whole basin of scalding soup. The man tore clothes off, but remained self-possessed. "I am a Christian. I must expect this" he said, and smiled at them. His assailant said "If I had thought you would have taken like that, I would not have done it. Sorry I did so". His patience rebuked their malice. All said he really was a Christian.

But men's opinion is not important. The main thing is that God calls us his sons. God is the great peacemaker, **the God of peace** (Hebrews 13:20). This is why he sent Christ, this is why Christ died. **Making peace through his blood, shed on the cross** (Colossians 1:20). **Prince of peace** (Isaiah 9:6). Christ humbled himself, he did not cling to prerogatives of deity **He humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross** (Philippians 2:5-8). **When they hurled their insults at him, they did not retaliate** (2 Peter 2:23).

When God sees us as having the mind of Christ, he calls us and recognises us as his children. God does not stand on his rights and dignity – else we should be in hell. His children should have same attitude. We must finish with self when we follow him,

and be concerned to share his peace with others. So God calls us now his children as his Spirit bears witness with our Spirit. And then see him face to face – publicly acclaim and call us his children as sees life with proofs of new birth seen in likeness to God.

So we have the peacemaker, who does not cause trouble, but indeed goes deeper than that. He himself knows and has been through the process of the Beatitudes – humble before God and meek, filled with his righteousness, and his heart has been purified. He has a changed disposition and nature, and sees the real problem of the human condition. He witnesses to Christ as the true source of peace.

Blessed are those persecuted for righteousness (v10)

We may endeavour to be peacemakers but so often reaction is one of hostility. Interesting that last of Beatitudes is a double Beatitude in third person and then second person **Blessed are those... Blessed are you....** (Matthew 5:10-12). We come back to the stones and rotten eggs rather than bouquets of scented roses.

Notice here Jesus' openness and honesty in dealing with disciples. When recruiting his disciples, he never hid wounds to gain a friend. Made it clear there was a price to be paid in belonging to him. Elsewhere he said he must come before father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters (Luke 14:26). And also, among people of the world who hated him and crucified him. To be identified with his cause means difficulty and persecution. See it in life of Peter and John, Stephen and Paul, readers of epistles especially Hebrews and 1 Peter. Throughout Church history – prison, burning, varied and horrific tortures - in varying ways and different degrees of intensity. Even when no torture, there is mockery, passing over for promotion, threats, or loss of education, denied of civil rights, whispering campaign, false statement and lies. More people have given lives for Christ in the 20th century than in all other centuries put together. We may yet have to know fiery trial in this land. Certainly there is agreement that Christian work is becoming harder. The Christian is not wanted, described as “divisive”, “anti-social”, “and unnecessary”. To admit to being an unashamed Christian, living by Bible principles, is not exactly a help in applying for a job.

Sometimes the strongest opposition is not from atheist but from religious establishment. Religious people are chief enemies of Jesus. Formal religion has no time for heart religion. **Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted** (2 Timothy 3:12). Luther said suffering is one of the marks of true church. Lutheran Augsburg Confession, 1530, “Church is country [writing unclear] of those persecuted and martyred for Gospel's sake”.

Reason for persecution

Begin with what the Beatitude does *not* say. It does not say blessed are those persecuted for wrong reasons – rudeness, bad workmanship, fanatical, foolish, objectionable, unwise, offensive, and busy body. So often we ask for trouble, we create lots of difficulties for ourselves. That is our own fault, and we have no right to claim this Beatitude. Only when persecuted for righteousness sake, will we be blessed, i.e. when we are committed to God's will, pleasing him in every area of life,

hungering and thirsting for this, living the life described in commandments and Sermon on the Mount, living like Christ, holy, walking as he walked. We are unlikely to be persecuted for being good or generous or kind. But we will almost certainly be persecuted for living a life conformed to God. The world is not concerned with God. The Christian's life is a challenge to conscience, and it upsets the world. Darkness hates light.

Second reason for persecution is for Christ's sake, because we declare we are his, that he is Lord and Master, centre of lives. For his glory and will. Honour his name. Belong to his church. Believe his Gospel. He is hated and persecuted like nobody else. **If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also** (John 15:20). The Christian is a certain type of person and lives life in different way. Regarded as "Different", "Out of line", "Not one of us". "Goes too far", "an embarrassment". Produces reaction Makes men feel uneasy and uncomfortable. Happen even if quiet and no great issue of things and just go about business. Not be surprised at reaction, indeed **Woe to you when all men speak well of you** (Luke 6:26).

Reaction to persecution

Do not retaliate, feel resentment or lose temper. That will only dishonour the Lord. Do not be cast down. Leave situation with him who judges righteously – as Jesus did. (1 Peter 2:23). Then comes bombshell – **Rejoice and be glad** (Matt. 5:12). Early church took him at his word, apostles before Sanhedrin, flogged, left rejoicing because counted worthy to suffer shame and disgrace for his name (Acts 5:41). Paul and Silas sang hymns to God at midnight (Acts 16:25). **Jesus, who for the joy set before him endured the cross** (Hebrews 12:2).

Why "rejoice"? Because it is proof and confirmation that we are Christians. Prophets and all people of God endured same treatment. We are identified with them. We are God's people.

Also persecution fixes mind on future. After this life the Child of God will enter Kingdom of heaven in its fullness after this life. Going to receive great reward. While salvation is all of grace and we are still unprofitable servants. (Luke 17:10), yet there are rewards for faithful service, rewards of God's grace though undeserving. Know where going and what awaits us. **For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all** (2 Cor. 4:17). **Now there is in store for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day** (2 Tim. 4:8).

Then going to see him face to face. Bodies to be changed. Souls will arrive at perfection. Tears, infirmities, weakness and death to be brought to an end. Eternity with him. Joy unspeakable and full of glory. Life is Christ now. Death is gain, **with Christ which is better by far** (Phil.1: 21-23). What else can we do but rejoice in face of all these things.

Non-Christians not thrilled by thought of future – death and world to come. One of reasons for pleasure mania. Designed to forget unpleasant and uncomfortable side of life and death. Christian faces it full in face. He can look forward with joy and anticipation

Conclusion

How these beatitudes test and examine us when realize depth and implications. Make clear radical difference in direction and destiny between Christian and non-Christian life. Point to fact that Christian life is supernatural in origin and maintenance. Quite beyond the natural man. By nature, we do not live like this and do not want to live like this.

Cannot make self a Christian. These beatitudes can only become reality and made possible when men are born from above and born anew. God has to work miracle in man's life. New birth. New outlook. New affections. New loves. Without God mankind is utterly and completely bankrupt. Totally dependent on God when cast selves on him. Find forgiveness through his son. Life and abundant life through his Spirit. "Life of God in soul of man".