

2008-07-12

Matthew 5:9 The Peace Makers

Jerry Arnold

...his father before him grew up in Michigan. I am not sure beyond that, I don't know. But my dad grew up in one town, small town called Big Rapids, Michigan. His family was fairly known there because my Dad's father had been the sheriff of Mecosta County. In fact, my dad, his four brothers and sister, lived in the jail house. Back in those days, you had a house and the jail, all right together. In fact, what grandma Arnold cooked for the family, was served to the occupants in the jail. We, who didn't appreciate her cooking, thought that that was part of the reason not to get caught doing something, or not to get arrested anyways.

Well, my dad and his family were known in this community. Later as my dad grew up, he became a Michigan state policeman and moved around several places. I was born in Cadillac Michigan, moved to Lavonia. And we lived in East Tawas, Michigan and then Monastic, up in the Upper Peninsula. We were living in East Tawas when this story took place. We had come from East Tawas to Big Rapids to be with my dad's family. Grandpa and grandma were still living, the aunts and uncles were there, and it was some type of get-together.

During that time of vacationing in Big Rapids, my dad decided that my brother Tom and I needed haircuts. Well, it's a small town, and back in those days children were not in as much danger as they are now. So they gave us our quarter of 50cents, or 75 cents or a dollar, I can't remember what the cost of a haircut was back then. But they gave us whatever that money was, told us to walk down the certain street, turn left and you'll see the barber right on the left. So my brother and I headed out to the barber shop. Got to the barber shop, we sat there and I was getting my hair cut.

And the barber is a friendly fellow, and he is asking us who we are and where we are from? I told him that we are from East Tawas Michigan; we are here visiting family in the area. He said, "Really, who is your family?" I said, "Grandma and Grandpa Arnold," and I had a couple of aunts and uncles in the area and told him their names. He said, "Well you must be one of the Arnold boys' children then," and I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well which one?" I said, "Dale!" He said, "Oh, Dale! He is your dad!" And this man started telling me stories about my father. They were good stories. And he had a great deal of respect for my dad, for his family, and I remember as a boy, sitting there in the barber's chair, thinking how great it was to have my father as my father because there was a sense of security, there was a sense of happiness, there was a pride. I felt hopeful. It was wonderful having my father as my father.

Now later, when I became an adolescent, I questioned God's wisdom in giving me my mom and dad? I wanted some other parents at times. And maybe you've been there, maybe you've experienced that, I don't know? But I have a question for you today. If you could choose your father, who would it be? Let's study that in the Word of God. Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 5, verse 9. We are continuing our series of Jesus' teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. This week, we are dealing with being a peace maker. In Matthew 5 verse 9 it says, "Blessed are the peace makers, for they shall be called sons of God."

I believe that this is probably the most quoted text from the Bible. You will hear politicians use it, social activists will use it, pacifists will use it, people standing in demonstrations with signs, "Blessed are the peace makers." And though it may be the most quoted text in the Bible, I think it likely could be the least understood text in the Bible. So we are going to seek to understand this text. And one of the ways that you can learn about a text is to take a Bible concordance and look up some of the key words. So if you take your Bible concordance and you look up the word, 'peace maker,' you will discover that is used one time in the Bible, right here.

Okay, well that wasn't helpful, so where do we go? Well, sometimes looking at what it doesn't mean can be helpful. So, we are going to that for just a moment. I'll show you what a 'peace maker' is not. Look at Galatians 5. Paul is going to describe to the churches in Galatia in this letter. He is talking about the Christian experience. He is going to describe the battle that takes place between the natural flesh or the old man, and the new man that will be associated with conversion, and walking in the Spirit. He says here in verse 16, "I say then, walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." That means you are not under condemnation.

Now look at verse 19. "Now the works of the flesh are evident which are adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness..." so all manner of sexual immorality, he is saying, are works of the flesh. It goes on to say in verse 20, "...idolatry and sorcery..." Now we are going to get into things that deal with the opposite of being a peace maker. "...hatred, contentions, jealousies, outburst of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you before hand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

The opposite of a peace maker will be a trouble maker. You've all met that type of person who is quarrelsome. They are always at it with somebody. If there is not a problem, they'll create a problem. It's just something about them. They have a prickly personality; you have to go carefully around them. It's like dancing with a porcupine. You might get a face full of quills if you are not careful. And that person is a type of person that is difficult. And you have to try extra hard to just have any harmony. I tell you brothers and sisters, let me be very, very frank with you. If that in anyway describes you, you will not inherit the Kingdom of God. You are not a Christian. That is the work of the flesh.

Now I am not saying you are not fighting against it. But we have to be victorious in the Lord, and He gives us victory. If we are a trouble maker, if we are quarrelsome, if we are prickly, if our life is a wake of destruction and broken relationships, and anger, and contention, and dissention, and division, and envy, and jealousy and on and on; I am going to say it again; I have to answer for your souls. You are not a Christian! And Paul says you cannot go to heaven if that's the way you are. So if that's the way you are, please listen, listen very carefully today because I want you to walk out of here different than how you came in.

Well, when we look at being a 'peace maker,' we look at the word and we see that basically it has two aspects, "a maker." Now a 'peace maker' is somebody who aggressively seeks to do something. There is an act, there is a decision, there is a plan. You don't make something, well, you can make a mess without a plan, but we are not getting the impression that this is a mess that is going to be made. It is a plan; there is a creative act involved. So it's an aggressive demeanor, or deportment, activity. But what does 'peace' mean? Most of us that are here read the Bible in English. Though I understand, some of you read it in Spanish; some of you may read it in another language. But in the English, the Greek word, "irene" is translated as peace. So when we read the word peace we read into it the understanding that we have of peace from our English word.

And here is what it means in English: serenity, quietness, tranquility, absence of conflict, dissension, trouble, or war; we say, 'that's peace.' And we all long for that peace and by the way, a peace maker is not a peace lover. Anybody is a peace lover. We are all peace lovers. That has nothing to do with spirituality. It just has a desire for peace. A peace maker! Well, the English says we are talking about serenity, quietness, tranquility, absence of conflict, dissension, trouble or war. But Jesus didn't teach in English. He didn't teach in Greek. Jesus spoke and taught in Aramaic. And Aramaic is very close to Hebrew. Jesus would not have said, "irene." Jesus would have used the Hebrew word or the Aramaic word that is so close to it. He would have said, "Shalom."

So what does "Shalom" mean? Shalom as you know, is a greeting used by Jews even today. It was used as a greeting back in Jesus' day. Instead of saying, "Hi, how are you," you'd say, "Shalom." And if you want to add a greeting for the Sabbath, they call the Sabbath "Shabbat." And so if you want a proper greeting on the Sabbath, you would say to a fellow or a sister, "Shabbat Shalom." Well what does shalom mean? Shalom is not a word that describes serenity, quietness, tranquility, absence of conflict, dissension, trouble or war. Shalom is different. It is everything which makes for a person's highest good. It is not even the absence of evil things, but for the presence and abundance of all good things and the person's greatest welfare.

So let's condense it down to something that we can handle. Peacemaking, according to the Scriptures, is going about to bring the highest good for others. Peacemaking is going about to bring the highest good for others. It would heal many relationships if people did that. Now here is the good news, think about it in this context. God obviously is the great Peacemaker. That means, He is going about to bring the highest good in your life. That's good news. Now, a peacemaker is no covered as some have described them. A peacemaker will confront, and if necessary will fight.

Remember, war began in heaven. Abraham is noted as being a peacemaker when he and his nephew Lot have herds and the herds are contending for grazing space, and the servants are in the battle about it. Abraham being the patriarch could have said to Lot, "You go here, and I'll go there." But Abraham, no, takes the highest road and he says, "Lot, you choose where you want to go, and I'll go where you don't go." He is a peacemaker. But continue reading the story about Abraham, and you will read that he takes 318 armed and trained servants and goes to war to

deliver those people who had been taken captive when the cities of the plain were attacked by five kings.

So a peacemaker is not a pacifist. A peacemaker is not somebody who is a doormat. A peacemaker is not a wife who is continually getting harassed physically or emotionally by a husband and she just takes it because she is a peacemaker. That is not a peacemaker. A peacemaker confronts and if necessary will fight. And necessary sometimes because bringing the highest good for others involves being honest and confronting. There is another element to it, and we won't spend much time there. But just for your information the whole concept of peacemaking has Messianic overtones. Jesus came to make peace between men and God, and a peacemaker will seek to do that. A peacemaker will seek to bring people to Christ, to bring people to God.

Well, how does someone become a peacemaker? How does somebody go about to bring the highest good for others? How does it take place? Let's go back to Matthew 5 and let's again rehearse just a little bit of the Sermon of the Mount that we have studied thus far. Knowing and understanding that what Jesus is saying is incrementally adding to an each different texts that we are taking. They all build on each other. We come to chapter 5 verse 3, He said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." That is describing a person who recognizes the poverty of spirit, their need for a Savior; they accept Christ as their Savior. In fact, from verse three on, through the beatitudes, everybody that Jesus is talking about is saved. They have eternal life.

Verse 4, "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted," is talking about a person who has embraced Christ as their Savior, now they have a true repentance, a mourning and grieving for the sinfulness of their lives. Verse 5, "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." That is a person who has accepted Christ, has true repentance, they are humble, teachable and seeking to do God's will in their life. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness..." The person has accepted Christ, has true repentance, they are humble, they want to be with Jesus and they want to be like Jesus. "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy" is a person who has embraced Christ, has true repentance, is humble, wants to be like Jesus and attempts to understand life through the perspective of another person, and consequently they are able to be merciful.

"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God," and that's talking about that internal struggle between the old man and the new man, with the new man beginning to dominate. And we spent considerable amount of time two weeks ago discussing how it can be so discouraging because you get tired of the battle. And being pure in heart is being faithful to the cause of God. Don't give up brothers and sisters; don't get discouraged because of the fight. Know and understand all of these people that have been described here are saved in Christ already. Even though you have that conflict going on that is good news. Because if Jesus wasn't in your life, you would have no conflict at all, you'd just sin and who cares? You'd feel bad, but you wouldn't have the conflict like you have when Christ comes in to establish Himself in the heart.

Verse 9, we come to peacemakers "...they'll be called the sons of God." Why? Because they are like their Father; God is the great Peacemaker. Well, how can we become a peacemaker? Obviously we have to have Jesus as our Savior. Obviously we have to be walking with Him. It involves peace with God, peace with our self, and then we are able to have peace with other people. Let's look at two verses that help us see this and understand it. Romans chapter 5 verses 1 and 2, Paul, writing his great theological treatise about salvation in Christ writes: "Therefore having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through whom also we have access by faith into this grace which we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

All right, "...having been justified," is a past act. We've embraced Christ as our Savior, we are justified and that happens by faith. It says we have peace with God. That means we have peace facing God. We are not afraid of His face anymore because we know we are okay in Christ. Now Karen and I, my wife, we were talking about this last night. And I was talking about forgiveness and how we get that in Jesus. And she gave me some counsel. She said, "Jerry, forget the term forgiveness. It is so often used, it has no meaning." She said she had a better term. I said, "All right, I want to hear that." And she gave it to me and she was right, and you are going to hear it now.

When we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior, yes, we receive forgiveness for our sins. But here is the good news. Our guilt is taken away. That guilt, that pounding, haunting, nagging, constant guilt telling us, "You are a failure, you are a failure, you are a failure here, and there in your life; you did this again, you did that again." That hounding guilt that keeps people awake at night, that hounding guilt that drives some to alcohol, others to drugs, others to a wild lifestyle running; running in their mind from that guilt. That's what goes when you accept Christ. I say, praise God. Now I want to show you an illustration. This tree is sin. Picture the sun in the sky. As the sun shines down on this tree of sin, it's going to cast a shadow. That shadow is going to be guilt, okay?

Now when I go to Jesus Christ as my Savior, what happens to the tree of sin? It is gone. As far as the East is from the West, to the depths of the sea, it is gone. Now, when that sin is removed by Jesus, what happens to the shadow of guilt? It no longer exists. So brothers and sisters, if you have Jesus as your Savior and you still feel guilty about the things in the past. Note! It is not God that is making you feel guilty. It is the devil trying to disrupt your peace and trying to disrupt your hope. And you can tell him where to go in the Name of Jesus. Tell him to go to his home, and if you are not sure where that is, talk to me afterwards when I am not being taped. You get this peace with God, guilt is gone, hope has come!

That's what happens in the heart. And I begin to have this peace with myself. No, I am not perfect, but that doesn't matter, Jesus was! And Jesus is! And I am saved in the Beloved. And in that context I am able to seek the good, the highest good for others, to minister to them. In fact, verse 2 says, "Through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand and rejoice in hope in the glory of God." And I thought - I want to follow hope a little bit in the Bible. Where is it going to take me? And here is where it took me. First John, chapter 3,

please turn there. First John chapter 3, verses 1-3, this is an amazing passage about hope. It says, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we shall be called children of God." And I thought this is interesting. Not only has hope taken me to this passage, which will be about hope, but it's also talking about the Father. Because, "Blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called the sons of God." So now, wow, this is exciting. I said, "I can't wait to preach this."

Look what it says: "Therefore the world does not know us because it didn't know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God. But is not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." Now before we proceed, notice the power of verse 2. "Beloved, now we are the children of God." It goes on to say, "...it has not yet been revealed what we shall be." I want you to know that in our denomination, many people are discouraged because they are so concerned about what they shall be rather than what they are in Christ right now. It says right now that "now we are the children of God."

When are we the children of God? A few of you responded. I want the loudest chorus of 'now' that you've ever heard. When are we the children of God? (Audience) "Now!" Absolutely, now! Right now! You don't have to earn it; you don't have to go out and try to prove yourself to God. When you are in Christ, that's what it says, "Look at the love of God, when you are in Christ, right now you are a child of God." You have eternal life in Christ. Now! And you know what, he goes on to say, and "we'll be like him when He comes." Okay! We won't have any more worry about that. We'll seek to follow Him day by day, and we'll let Him worry about what we are going to be like later.

But notice what happens. Here is where the hope is, verse 3: "And everyone who has this hope in Him, purifies himself just as He is pure." What hope? The hope is that now I am a child of God. That gives me hope; that gives me courage. Guilt is gone away. The burden of guilt has been taken away. I have peace with God, peace with myself; I am able to seek peace with other people and to seek after their best good. And that hope causes me to want to be pure. In the context of being saved right now, I do seek to live a better life, but not be accepted because I am accepted. And I want God to be well pleased with me.

Well, I thought this is fascinating. You know, we are seeing hope in this message and we've got the Father. You know, here again another message about our Father, so I thought, well I am going to shake down "Father" through the Scriptures and see what that says. And it took me to this passage in John chapter 8, a fascinating discussion that Jesus is having with some Jewish people. John chapter 8 and we'll begin in verse 31 with Jesus speaking. In John 8 verse 31 He says: "If you abide in My words, you are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Now notice what happens, verse 33: "They answered Him, 'We are Abraham's descendants. We have never been in bondage to anyone, how can you say, you will be made free?'"

Now I want to rehearse some history with you and help you to realize how disingenuous their comments are. They are Abrahams descendants, never been in bondage? Had they forgot about Egypt? Had they forgot about Babylon, or had they forgot about the Roman soldiers who were probably right outside listening? They were in bondage then. But there is a different bondage that Jesus is talking about, verse 34 He says: "Most assuredly I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin..." That's the bondage. "...and a slave does not abide in the house forever, but the son abides forever." I am liking this because peace makers are called the sons of God. And the son abides forever! That's good news. A son abides forever.

Well it goes on and he applies it directly to himself in verse 36: "...therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed." May I again reiterate, reemphasize, and I hope it hits home. As somebody spoke to me two weeks ago, they said, "You mean we only have to accept Jesus and we have the eternal life?" Yes, yes, yes! It says, "If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed!" It's His work to make you free; it's our work to just let him, not to fight it; to accept Him and to seek by His grace to walk with Him in the freedom He has given us. "I know that you are Abraham's descendants but you seek to kill Me because My word has no place in you. I speak what I have seen with My Father and you do what you have seen with your father." That's fascinating, "My Father -- your father."

"They answered and said to Him, 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus said to them, 'If you are Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this.'" In other words, "You are like your father." They used to say things like this regarding my father and me. "The acorn doesn't fall far from the tree." "You are like your dad. You look like your mom but you are like your dad." Hum, thank you mom.

Verse 41: "'You do the deeds of your father.' Then they said to him, 'We are not born of fornication, we have one father, God.'" Hum, yeah, you are a "?" if you need the word, talk to me after, is what they are saying to Jesus, illegitimate child. Verse 42, "Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love Me for I preceded forth and came from God, nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me.'" If you want the Gospel in one text, there it is. "If God were your Father, you would love Me." That's it. If you don't love Jesus, God is not your Father. You can answer that question yourself.

He goes on to say, "Why do you not understand my speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word." Now, this is important. Again, I preach as one who realizes I will answer to God some day for what I say and don't say. And I am not going to answer without saying, "I did the best I could." It's saying right here, "...able to listen to My word." I hope that everyone who is sitting here has not checked out. I hope you are not texting somebody, or just daydreaming, or thinking about lunch, or the hike you will go on, or the swim, or whatever you do on the Sabbath? I hope you are engaged. I want everybody to wake up. This is eternal life we are talking about. This is the most important message you've ever heard in your life. It's right now, please listen to God's word!

"You..." He says to the people back then, "...you are of your father, the devil. And the desire of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources. For he is a liar and a father of it, but because I tell the truth you do not believe me. Which of you convicts me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? He who is of God, hears God's words. Therefore you do not hear because you are not of God." Only you can answer that question. Are you hearing God's words? If you are not, you are not of God. It boils down to this. When Christ shows up into a person's life, somebody is going to die. There are only two fathers, and we are the children of one or the other. If Jesus comes to our life, and we reject Him; we in essence will crucify Him on Calvary's cross, and we will holler vehemently, "Crucify Him, crucify Him, crucify Him."

If when Jesus comes we embrace Him as our Savior, we will say to him, "Lord, crucify me, crucify me, crucify me that You may live in and through me." Today, I ask you if you could choose your father, who would you choose? In fact, that's indeed what I'm going to ask you to do. If you decide to choose God as your Father, you will have eternal life in Christ. If you decide not to choose God as your Father, you will do the works of your father. You will seek to destroy Jesus. Really, if you want to boil the whole judgment down to one issue, it's really God asking this one question, "Who is your father? Who is your father?" If in Christ, He knows the answer is Him. If not in Christ, He knows the answer is the devil. And you have no hope of eternal life with the devil being your father.

But if God is your Father, the Son abides forever. So what's your decision? What do you want to do? If you could choose your father, who would it be? And today my question is simply this. If you want God to be your Father, if you are able to stand, stand. If not, raise your hand. "Father in Heaven, we pray that indeed You will be our Father. That Christ will live and dwell within us and that we because of Your grace to us will have peace with ourselves and will seek the very best good for other people. This is our prayer, in Jesus name, Amen."