

Making Peace with God

September 19, 2021

Matthew 5:8-9

This morning, as we continue the initial phase of our study of the Greatest Sermon ever preached, the Sermon on the Mount, we come to two key attributes, two key characteristics of the citizen of the Kingdom: the pure in heart, and the peacemakers. Each of these terms is loaded, and perhaps should be the subject of multiple sermons on their own. But for the sake of time, I am dealing with both today.

It is clear that we have turned the corner from descriptive terms concerning a recognition of good things we lack (like poor in spirit), to possession of good things we have, or must have: a pure heart. In fact, the second one is an active attribute, peacemaker. That is actually something you DO. It is an action. We are clearly at a climactic point in both the process of becoming a believer and the characteristic of the believer. This represents the pinnacle of both.

Indeed, the first beatitude today is actually quite incompatible to the first one in the list. With poor in spirit, we must get to the point where we recognize that we are spiritually bankrupt, that we have no spiritual assets. And yet, with pure in heart, we actually have the very thing we lacked in the first one, purity of heart. In the first one, we confessed we were NOT pure, but now we are pure. Something must have happened in between. The process of becoming a believer is progressing. God has been at work!

So, we begin by reading these two short verses, recognizing the pattern that we have been seeing all along. Follow along as I read Matthew 5:8-9. READ.

Main point: Blessed by God are all who have made peace with God and been given a new, pure heart!

It is a supreme act of God to be declared pure, to be at complete peace with Holy God. It is not something we can do on our own, it does not come naturally. It only comes to us as a gift. Once more, these two beatitudes show us that we are on the right track, that our approach to these beatitudes is the correct one. Otherwise they make no sense. So, as we go through this text, I urge you to ponder whether or how these truths are true about you. This is what it takes to be a citizen of God's Kingdom. Are you in? (2 parts)

I. Only God can make your heart pure. v. 8

You have been blessed by God when He takes your sin stained, corrupted heart and replaces it with a clean one, a pure one. As I hope will become clear as we examine this beatitude, there is nothing we can do to create this condition. It is impossible for us to do this ourselves. It must be a result of an act of God. Once more, this convinces me that we are approaching these beatitudes correctly. This is what Jesus had in mind when He preached them.

v.8- "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

By this point, I hope most of you know the pattern. First is the declaration of blessing, in this context the recognition that God's hand of blessing is and has been on such a person. It is not that the person has this quality and so God puts His hand of blessing upon them. It is that this quality can only come as a result of God's hand of blessing being on the person. Of all the beatitudes, perhaps this one makes that most clear. Let's tear it apart.

The word "pure" is key. Pure is not a comparative, as in "better than it was," or "better than the next guy," or "not as bad as it could be." No, this is a state of perfection. Something is either pure or it is not. It is not more pure or less pure, it is pure, plain and simple. Now, this is extremely problematic for us if we take seriously what we saw back in the first beatitude. There, we had to

recognize that we were spiritually poor, that we had nothing good in us. We were not pure, we were not holy, we were not acceptable before God. And yet here, there is a declaration of purity.

So, what must take place in order to achieve a state of purity? Can you add anything to something that is impure to make it pure? Is there any quantity of good things you can add to something that is impure that will make it pure? Not at all. It is impossible to make pure through addition. That only makes it “less impure,” watered down impure. Instead, something has to be taken away, removed. Impurities must be removed in order for it to be pure. Some sort of impurity killer, some disinfectant has to be added to make it pure.

And then, that depends on the damage that has been done by the impurities. It can be and indeed is the case here that impurities have caused such damage that the only solution is replacement, pure for impure, clean for unclean, spotless for hopelessly stained. It is no coincidence nor inconsequential thing that David cries out to God in Psalm 51:10, “Create in me a clean heart, O God.” This clean heart, a pure heart, that David knew he needed and desperately desired, had to come as a creation from God.

Then we come to the term, “heart.” We must not think in terms of organ that pumps blood through the body. In Scripture, most often the heart is the center of the person, that which controls the rest of the body. Modern culture uses the heart in this way when it sends the message to “follow your heart.” But modern society lacks a proper understanding of the heart. The truth is that we ALWAYS follow our heart. The heart ALWAYS directs our path...and that is a problem because by nature the heart is impure, unclean, not reliable to lead us in a good path. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” That is God’s perspective on the heart. It is deceitful, it has been irreparably damaged by sin. That is the perspective of God concerning the natural state of man’s heart. It is impure, desperately wicked with no hope of fixing. It needs to be replaced.

So, when this beatitude declares God's blessing on the one with a pure heart, it must mean that God has done a work in such a person. His old, natural, impure, deceitful heart has been replaced with one that is pure. Such a procedure cannot be performed by man, even by skilled surgeons. There is no lab where such pure hearts can be cultivated in rats or petri dishes. They can only come from the hand of God.

Blessed is the person who has been given a pure heart, a soft heart, a reliable heart to replace the heart of stone, the hard heart, the deceitfully wicked heart. That person has been blessed by God. Such a person is promised "for they shall see God." It is not that God will become visible to them even though He is Spirit. The sense here is that such a person will one day stand before God without being destroyed. They will spend eternity before God. In other words, you must have a new, pure heart to get to see God! They will enter the Kingdom, the same basic message to all of the promises in this section. You must have a pure heart in order to stand before God. Blessed are the people who receive one.

And this is also the way such people live. They live out of their new heart rather than their old heart. They are guided through life by this new, pure, God-directed heart. Even though there will always be a conflict between the two hearts (think wretched man), the way they live demonstrates that they have been given a new heart, a clean heart. They will increasingly be able to trust this new heart to lead them in a right direction. They will be soft toward the things of God and the things that God asks them to do. They increasingly demonstrate the work that God has done in them. They have a pure heart and it shows!

So, how about you? If you are a follower of Jesus, your impure heart has been replaced with a pure heart. Yes, you still struggle with sin, you always will. But there is a new center of your being that is God directed, Kingdom directed. Can anyone tell? Or, are you still trying to plug along on the old heart that always seems to get you into trouble?

II. Blessed is the man who makes peace with God. v. 9

This is the last in the steps to become a follower of Jesus. From here, the blessing is upon those who suffer for the sake of the gospel, and as I've already indicated, this represents a different type of beatitude. This one is active in nature. I hope this will become clear.

9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Again, we see the same pronouncement of blessing. It comes to us as a gift that we are peacemakers, meaning we can take no credit for ourselves. So, what does it mean to be a peacemaker? This seemingly common word needs a whole bunch of unpacking. Clearly it is made up of two parts: peace and maker. Let's take peace first. The word peace is a key word in the Hebrew worldview. It is MORE than we might expect. In our culture, our language, peace often means the absence of violence. As long as we are not shooting at each other, we are said to be at peace. Peace to us is often viewed as the absence of hostilities. But this is not what the word means at all to the Hebrew mindset, the biblical worldview.

Peace is not the absence of a negative but the presence of a positive. It is a state of tranquility, of harmony and union. Peace describes a situation when all is right between two parties. Let me describe it this way: we tend to believe that good fences mean that we are at peace. And I believe in good fences: good fences make good neighbors. But that does not mean we are at peace. Indeed, it means that without the fences we know we would probably be at war with each other! We have fences, we build walls because we know that we live as sinners among sinners. We lock our doors to keep bad people from stealing our stuff or harming us. Just because no one has ever stolen my car doesn't mean I should not lock it at the mall.

Instead, being at peace means we do not need fences because we see ourselves as being on the same side. We don't lock our cars because no one would ever want to steal what I have. It is not in their hearts to do so. No, peace

is much, much more than the absence of hostilities. It is harmony and unity among parties.

Now, that brings us to the next issue. Such a blessed person is NOT one who is by nature against hostilities, a peaceable person or a peaceful person. I hate conflict with a passion, as much as anyone. But this does not mean that I am a peacemaker. Indeed, those who turn a blind eye to violence and conflict, who avoid it like the plague (as I am by nature) are not peacemakers at all. It is the opposite of that. Peacemaking means running into the middle of the conflict, not running away from it. The one who hears gunshots and runs away is not the peacemaker. The one who hears gunshots and runs toward is the peacemaker. This beatitude does not describe people who sit in a circle around a campfire and sing Kum By Ya, or march down the streets demanding that we pull all troops home. That is NOT peacemaking. That is giving in to tyrants, or caring not that people are mistreated, caring more about your comfort than your neighbor's well being. No, being peaceable or peaceful is NOT the same as peacemaking. Peacemaking is active.

This brings us to the second half of the word: making. You certainly can see that this is an active word: you MAKE peace. Clearly this means that our natural state is NOT peace, we are naturally at war. And the peacemaker gets involved in the situation by getting between the warring parties and usually suffering injuries from both sides. After all, the supreme peacemaker is Jesus. This is what He did: He positioned Himself between two warring parties and suffered the wrath of both. That is how Scripture describes Him. He bore the wrath of God, He endured the wrath of man. He made peace where there was none. No, making peace is not being inactive, but active. You get bloody making peace. You get shot at making peace. Peacemakers get shot at from all sides.

So, what does it mean here? Well, first of all the battle at the heart of the situation here is between sinful man and holy God, right? I trust that is clear to you. As I said, Jesus is the supreme peacemaker. Colossians 1:19-22 puts it this way,

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. 21 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,

That is peacemaking! But how is it that one makes peace with God? Does God need to change? Does He need to lay down His arms? Not at all. In this case, one side is completely at fault and the other side is completely right, or righteous. So, what has to happen to make peace? Sinners have to surrender, and the one in the right has to make a way for sinners to be made right, to be on the same side. This is what it means to become a believer: we surrender our position, our thoughts of being right, our claim to being right or good enough, and submit to the rightness of God. God does not have to accommodate us, we have to surrender to Him.

Paul puts it this way in Ephesians 2:13-17, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

Jesus is the peacemaker. Romans 5:1 says, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” He does the work; all that is required of us is to give up fighting and accept what Christ has done for us. If we keep on fighting, demanding justice from God, then it means we have not made peace with God. But when we give up our attitude of rightness and sense of being wronged, accepting the help that Jesus offers in place of that, we have made peace. The believer is at peace with God. He has surrendered, received the gift of Jesus and given up the fight. Now, the

two are one, they are on the right side. This is what it means to be a peacemaker with God: giving up and humbly receiving what Jesus has done for you.

And then such a person lives that way. He takes up the ministry of reconciliation as Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 5. You might say that it is the opposite of troublemaking. The troublemaker brings trouble with him wherever he goes. The peacemaker brings peace with him wherever he goes. The troublemaker goes where there is no trouble and makes trouble. The peacemaker goes where there is no peace and makes peace. He is a minister, a missionary of peace with God and each other. He wants others to experience the peace that he has found. He tells them about Jesus as the peacemaker even at the risk of ridicule or alienation. He is willing to suffer the consequences of urging people to make peace by giving up their fight against God. More on this next week.

Then there is the promise: for they shall be called sons of God. Again, in a large sense, this simply means they will receive the promise of inclusion in the Kingdom of God. They shall be one with God. They shall be given the name of God. Instead of being in a state of strife against God, they will be counted among the sons of God. They are promised to be declared to be on God's side, an honored member of God's family. Even women here will be sons, meaning they stand to receive an equal inheritance as their male counterparts. They become family.

There, this completes the process of becoming a believer. The last step is making peace with God. So, first of all, have you made peace with God? Have you surrendered your position and received the gift Jesus the great Peacemaker has offered to you? If so, then welcome to the family!

Then, do you see yourself, your mission as that of peacemaking? Do you see yourself as an ambassador sent into hostile territory with the mission of making as much peace or perhaps making peace with as many people as you can? Are you an ambassador of reconciliation? Are you willing to get beat up by people on all sides? I hope you can already see how this leads us to the next beatitude that we will take up next week, those who are persecuted. Persecution comes from peacemaking. But that's next week!

For today, if we believe this passage is the Word of God, then what should be different about our lives?

1) We will see ourselves as having naturally impure hearts and naturally in a state of strife or war against God.

2) We will be active in making peace with God, surrendering our position of self-righteousness.

3) We will live out of our new self and not our old self.

4) We will give thanks to Jesus for paying the price for our rebellion.

5) We will see as our mission a ministry of peacemaking.