

## BUILDING CHARACTER: On Being a Peacemaker

### A Study of Matthew 5:9

Characteristic of Completeness: Peace

Big Idea: Making peace makes Christmas.

Related Scriptures: Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 5:43-45a; 18:15-17; Mark 9:50; Luke 2:14;  
Romans 5:1, 10; 10:14-15; 14:19; Ephesians 4:1-3; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Colossians 3:12-15;  
1 Thessalonians 5:13; 2 Timothy 2:22; Hebrews 12:14; James 3:18; 2 Peter 3:14

#### Introduction

1. Peace on earth. It's a Christmas theme everybody knows. You see the word "peace" on Christmas cards and ornaments. You hear the word "peace" in Christmas carols. And peace is not just a nice-sounding product of political correctness. It's biblical. In the Bible, the coming of the Christ child brings peace.

Hundreds of years before the Christ child came, the prophet Isaiah uttered these ► prophetic, famous words:

<sup>NAU</sup> Isaiah 9:6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. [emphasis mine]

In the equally famous account of Christ's birth in the gospel of Luke, the angels ► sing out:

<sup>NAU</sup> Luke 2:14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace . . ." [emphasis mine]

That's the Christmas theme everybody knows: The Christ child brings *peace*. And in our culture, this is mostly something we celebrate. We make merry. We throw the Christmas parties. Bake the cookies. Trim the tree. Send the cards. Decorate the house. Have people over. Enjoy the revelry.

2. But ► I want to talk about the Christmas theme nobody knows. Or at least a lot of people seem to act like they don't know. Oh, it's still about peace and it's still tied to Christ. In fact, our ► Characteristic of Completeness for the week is Peace. That's what we're talking about this morning: peace.

Nevertheless, I want to suggest that Christmas is more than a celebration. There's more than revelry. There's also responsibility. As Christians, we are not only to *celebrate* peace, but we are also to *make* peace. Peace is not just something to enjoy; it is also something to pursue. As believers, we have a responsibility to *make* peace.

And making peace makes all the difference in Christmas. In fact, the ► big idea of my message is this: Making peace makes Christmas. Just as the right ingredients make a meal. Just as good friends make a party. Just as a caring, competent teacher makes a class. So making peace makes Christmas.

I get this idea from the biblical text we're studying today. It's Matthew 5:9. In ► Matthew 5:9, Jesus says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Matthew 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

From this text, I want to answer just ► two questions—two questions that serve as the outline of my sermon. First, ► what kind of peace do peacemakers make? What sort of peace is in view? How is peace made? And ► second, how does making peace make Christmas? What difference does it make? Why is it important?

I. First ► things first. What kind of peace do peacemakers make?

The original word for "peacemaker" describes someone who actively tries to reconcile people who are at odds with each other.<sup>1</sup> It's someone who actively tries to establish a friendly relationship between persons.<sup>2</sup>

And I want to show you that there are two kinds of peace to be made. A peacemaker makes two kinds of peace. Each peace is distinguished by the parties involved.

A. One kind of peace is vertical, between God and people. As such, a peacemaker is one who urges unbelievers to be reconciled with God. A peacemaker tells others of the good news of Jesus Christ in the hope that they will believe and have peace with God. A peacemaker tries to bring God and people together in harmony.

1. The need for peace between God and us is great. The Apostle Paul explains in ► Romans 5:10 that, apart from Christ . . .

<sup>NAU</sup> Romans 5:10 . . . we were enemies . . .

Enemies of God.

2. As enemies of God, the only path to peace with Him is faith in Christ. Romans ► 5:1 explains:

<sup>1</sup> W. Bauer, F.W. Danker, W.F. Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., s.v. "εἰρηνοποιός," (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), hereinafter abbreviated BDAG.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, s.v. "εἰρηνοποιός," (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000).

<sup>NAU</sup> Romans 5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ

3. In order to have peace with God, we must have faith in Christ. And, in order to have faith in Christ, there must be someone to proclaim the good news of peace in Christ. There must be peacemakers who share this good news—the good news that, by His death and resurrection for our sins, Christ alone offers eternal life and peace as a Christmas gift to all who will simply believe Him for it. Romans ► 10:14-15 presents the need for peacemakers who tell this good news. It says:

<sup>NLT</sup> Romans 10:14 But how can they [unbelievers] call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? ► 15 And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, “How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!”

Peacemakers are the real “beautiful people.” They bring good news of peace. So the first kind of peace a peacemaker makes is vertical, between God and people.

- B. Another ► kind of peace is horizontal, between one person and another. Over and over again, the Bible calls us to live in peace with one another, particularly within the church. We are to work at living together in harmony. We are to seek resolution to conflicts. Let me quickly rattle off just a sampling of supporting ► Scriptures:

<sup>NAU</sup> Romans 12:18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

► <sup>NAU</sup> Romans 14:19 So then we pursue the things which make for peace . . .

► <sup>NAU</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:11 . . . live in peace . . .

► <sup>NAU</sup> Ephesians 4:3 [be] diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

► <sup>NAU</sup> Colossians 3:15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts . . .

► <sup>NAU</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:13 . . . Live in peace with one another.

► <sup>NAU</sup> 2 Timothy 2:22 . . . pursue righteousness, faith, love *and* peace . . .

► <sup>NAU</sup> Hebrews 12:14 Pursue peace with all men . . .

▶ <sup>NLT</sup> James 3:18 . . . those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace . . .

▶ <sup>NAU</sup> 2 Peter 3:14 . . . be diligent to be found by Him in peace . . .

These all refer to the horizontal peace—the peace between one person and another—that peacemakers make. It’s getting along. It’s living in harmony. It’s being reconciled to one another.

So ▶ what kind of peace to peacemakers make? Two kinds: vertical and horizontal. Vertical, between God and people. Horizontal, between one person and another.

II. That ▶ brings us to the second question: How does making peace make Christmas? What difference does it make? Why is it important?

A. Well, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ this morning, some peacemaker made your Christmas. Having believed in Jesus for eternal life, Christmas means more to you now. In some ways, it still might be lonely; it still might be difficult; it still might be exhausting. But the true meaning of Christmas goes deeper for you—all because some peacemaker at some point brought you and Jesus together.

Last night was a wonderful night with my family. The kids and their spouses were over. I made a memory by making some hot chocolate. I put it in a blender to make it frothy, but I ended up spraying it all over the kitchen. Cathy made my favorite comfort food: meatloaf. We had a fire going, and we watched *A Charlie Brown Christmas* together. While Linus was reciting Luke 2, I was thinking how good it is that my whole family believes in Jesus. And then I traced it all back to 1975—the year when Cathy was bold enough to be my peacemaker. She introduced me to Christ. The peace we enjoyed last night came from the peace she made for me over thirty years ago.

Who is the peacemaker in your life? Who introduced you to Jesus? I have two suggestions regarding that person.

1. First, thank your peacemaker. If he or she is alive, you could simply say, in person, or on the phone, or in writing: “Thank you for making my Christmas by introducing me to Christ.” If your peacemaker is not alive, you could simply thank God for using that person in your life.
2. My second suggestion is this: Pass along the favor. Someone made your Christmas; now isn’t it your turn? Could there be anything more important or more fulfilling than someone someday saying to you, “Thanks for making my Christmas by introducing me to Christ”?

B. There is another way that making peace makes Christmas, and I believe it is the emphasis of our text. It comes from the last part, which may be hard to understand. It says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Matthew 5:9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

What does it mean to be called sons of God? Well, the phrase, “sons of God” emphasizes the character of a person.<sup>3</sup> In ancient biblical times, it was common to call someone the son of something as a way of describing his character.<sup>4</sup> James and John were called sons of thunder (Mark 3:17). Barnabas was called a son of encouragement (Acts 4:36). Judas was called a son of perdition (John 17:12). As such, to be called sons of God is to be identified as displaying the character of God.<sup>5</sup>

The idea is that, when we make peace, particularly the horizontal peace with one another within the church, people will recognize us as being godly. When we make peace, we look like God. When we make peace, we make Christmas real in the eyes of unbelievers. When we make peace, our Christmas reveals the Redeemer. When we make peace, we glorify the Prince of peace. In that way, making peace makes Christmas. It makes Christmas far more than just revelry; it’s an opportunity—an opportunity for the unbelieving world to see us as sons of God.

1. This idea is corroborated elsewhere in Scripture. For example, in ► Matthew 5:44, Jesus speaks of making peace with antagonists when He says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Matthew 5:44 “. . . love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”

Then, in Verse 45, He explains the reason for making peace. It is to reflect God’s character. He says ► it’s . . .

<sup>NAU</sup> Matthew 5:45 “so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven . . .”

Once again, to be “sons of your Father” is to reflect the Father’s character so the people can see.

Elsewhere, ► Jesus describes the positive, God-honoring influence of believers in the world. He uses salt as a metaphor. In ► Mark 9:50, He says,

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<sup>3</sup> As distinct from “children of God,” which emphasizes position.

<sup>4</sup> D.A. Carson, *Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount: And His Confrontation with the World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1978, 1987, 1999, 2005), 28; Haddon W. Robinson, *The Christian Salt and Light Company*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Discover House Publishers, 1988), 85.

<sup>5</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew, The New American Commentary*, ed. David S. Dockery, (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 100; Carson, 28; Robert A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding*, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 92; Robinson, 85; David L. Turner, *The Gospel of Matthew, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, ed. Philip W. Comfort, (Carol Streams, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005), 77-78.

<sup>NAU</sup> Mark 9:50 “Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty *again*? Have salt in yourselves . . .”

Here, “have salt in yourselves” means pretty much the same thing as “be sons of your Father.” It’s reflecting the character of God. But I want you to notice how Jesus connects making peace with being salty in the last part of Verse 50. He ► says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Mark 9:50 “. . . Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

Being at peace with one another makes us salty, and therefore, it makes Christmas. If we believers do not make peace, the unbelieving world can gain a lot of things at Christmas—gifts, pounds, debt—but a fresh interest in Christ isn’t one of them. Making peace makes Christmas.

2. Only ► one problem. We have conflicts. We’re human. I dare say many of us have something simmering with somebody right now. And if we don’t, something might start with uncle Otto when he arrives tomorrow. Conflict is inevitable.

Maybe you’ve felt like you’ve been shafted in a business deal. Maybe somebody has lied to you. Maybe somebody has slandered you. Maybe somebody has abused you, either physically or emotionally. Maybe somebody has snubbed you, excluded you, belittled you, wronged you. Maybe it’s a spouse, or a friend, or a fellow church member, or a colleague in business.

How can we be at peace with one another? In particular, how can we make peace with those with whom we are in some kind of conflict, particularly fellow believers?

In the face of conflict, we have ► three general options, only one of which is legitimate.<sup>6</sup>

- a. One illegitimate response to conflict is ► to *fake* peace. “Peacefaking” is a form of escape. It includes running from conflict by ending a friendship, or quitting a job, or getting a divorce, or leaving a church. These may be justified in some situations, but they are generally not good biblical solutions.

“Peacefaking” can also include denial. It’s when we simply pretend there isn’t a problem. We ignore it and look the other way. This can

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<sup>6</sup> I’m drawn much of the following from Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, 2d. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1991, 1997), 17-21, 135-137.

bring some short-term relief. But it never really solves the problem; it usually just gets worse. “Peacefaking” is ► not a good option.

- b. At the opposite end of the spectrum is another illegitimate response to conflict: ► to break peace. “Peacebreaking” includes attack responses. Like revenge, or retaliation, or vilification, or slander, or assault. These are ► not biblical options, particularly within the church.
- c. In the face of conflict, the only legitimate option is ► to make peace. Peacemaking includes conciliation responses.

Peacemaking can include simply overlooking an offense. If the offense is minor, it’s usually best to graciously forget about it. But, sometimes it’s hard to know when to overlook an offense. One noted Christian author and conciliator offers four questions as useful guides to determine whether or not we should overlook an offense.<sup>7</sup>

- (1) Here’s ► the first question: “Is it dishonoring to God?” Is the person openly soiling the reputation of Christ or His church in the community? If so, the offense probably shouldn’t be overlooked.
- (2) Here’s ► the second question: “Is it damaging your relationship?” Have your feelings, thoughts, or actions toward the other person been adversely affected for an extended period of time? If so, the offense probably shouldn’t be overlooked.
- (3) Here’s ► the third question: “Is it hurting others?” This includes things like physical or emotional abusiveness, slander, divisiveness, and setting a bad example for others. If it hurts you or others, the offense probably shouldn’t be overlooked.
- (4) Here’s ► the fourth and final question: “Is it hurting the offender?” Is the offender alienating himself from God? Is he abusing his body with alcohol or drugs? If so, the offense probably shouldn’t be overlooked.

If you cannot overlook an offense, then there is a series of conciliation responses involving gradually widening spheres of

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<sup>7</sup> Sande, 135-137.

influence—all intended to bring restoration, according to Matthew 18:15-17.

It involves first approaching the offender individually and lovingly confronting him about his sin, without being self-righteous or hypocritical. If that doesn't work, you bring in one or two others to help sort things out. If that doesn't work, you enlist the help of church leaders. The entire process always has the goal of restoration; it is always intended to make peace.

Is ► there someone with whom you need to make peace this Christmas? Only two more peacemaking days left 'till Christmas. There's still time to take a first step. The first step might simply be to pray, asking God if there is some peace for you to make with someone else. What would the next step be? It might be a confession. Or an apology. Or telling someone honestly but gently how you've been hurting.

About two thousand years ago, the Christ child came into the world to make peace. Let's follow His lead in making peace. It makes all the difference. Merry Christmas.