

The Sermon on the Mount (Part 1)

The Good Life – A Fresh look at the Beatitudes

Study 7 – The Family of the Peacemakers

Introduction

For many people today, the words 'Christianity' and 'peace' do not belong in the same sentence. To them, all religion, Christianity included, fosters bigotry and intolerance and thus promotes conflict between otherwise peace-loving communities. In the words of John Lennon's famous song *Imagine* a world unfettered by belief in heaven or hell and unencumbered by nationalism or religion would mean people living for today and living life in peace. Politics and religion - the traditional no-no's of polite conversation around the dinner table - the father and mother of all conflicts and wars.

To be fair, a lot of war has been waged in the name of religion, sadly sometimes even in the name of Christ. One need only think of the Crusades during the Middle Ages or the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland or the so-called Christian militia who have been involved in conflicts in the Balkans or on the continent of Africa. Then again, we do need to admit that many wars have been fought in the name of atheism as well, so the real issue is perhaps that people as a rule are not nearly as peace loving as we think.

Either way, the bigger question is whether those who fought wars in the name of Christ were in fact true to Christ's vision of the kingdom of heaven and thus to their calling as followers of Jesus. And the answer of the Bible as a whole and of the New Testament in particular is an overwhelming 'No'! Facing charges of fostering rebellion Jesus answered Pontius Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were my servants would fight...." (John 18:36). And to His disciples, among them people like Simon the Zealot, Jesus said: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God".



Investigate and Think



Read Matthew 5:9

- What do you understand by the words 'peace' and 'peace makers'?

- What do you think Jesus means when He says that the ‘peacemakers’ will be called ‘sons of God’?

The word translated ‘peace’ in the Old Testament is the word *shalom* or ‘rest’, a word that has its roots in Genesis 2:1-3. God’s design for humanity was that they should enjoy blessing and rest in His presence in the good world that God had created (Genesis 1:1- 2:25). The result of human rebellion was that human beings were cut off from God and so become restless wanderers on the earth (Genesis 3:1-4:12). What was true of humanity in general also became true of Israel in exile, expelled because of sin from the land in which God had intended them to enjoy blessing and rest. With this in mind,

Read Psalm 85

- What does restored peace for the people of God look like according to this Psalm?

- How will this peace be accomplished?

Read Ezekiel 37:21-28

- What does restored peace for God’s people look like according to this passage?



Apply

- In what ways have Jesus' words in Matthew 5:9 challenged or encouraged you?

- Would you consider yourself to be 'peace maker'?

- If your answer above was 'No', what needs to change for this Beatitude to be true of you?

- If your answer above was 'Yes', what are the areas in which you need to grow in relation to this Beatitude?