

Blessed are the Peace-makers.

This is one of the statements in the famous 'Beatitudes', which were spoken by Jesus to his disciples as a response to seeing the needs of the multitudes. Jesus' response was not to go immediately to the crowds who needed Him, but rather to invest in small group of people whom He could train and send to the multitudes.

Seeing the great need 'out there', these are the things Jesus felt it was important to see built into the lives of His disciples to prepare them their huge task of being His messengers. Therefore they are very important for us too. Let's see this statement in its context.

Matthew 5:9 "Blessed are the peace-makers for they will be called sons of God."

Greek for **Blessed** - Makarios. This is a wonderful word used here. It means, literally, '*possessing the characteristics of deity*' or '*partakers of the Godhead*'! Let this sink in..... The same thought is seen in **2 Peter 1:4** "...He has granted to us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption that is in the world caused by evil desires." Wow!

It can also be translated as

"Privileged recipients of Divine favour are....." It refers to *someone whom God makes fully satisfied, not because of favourable circumstances but because they are indwelt by God through Christ*. It is a much deeper word than 'happy'.

What is peace?

Not the absence of something but the presence of something. Not the absence of conflict, trouble, war....., but the presence of **SHALOM** (= *holistic well-being and prosperity*.) The Greek word for **peace** is *eirene*. It means *state of untroubled, unperturbed well being* - the end of strife brought about by God's mercy, granting deliverance and freedom from all the distresses that are experienced as a result of sin.

Jesus had wept over Jerusalem saying, "If only you had known the things that would make for your peace!" (Luke 19:41-42) He had told them what would make for their peace – that they should love God and love their neighbours and even their enemies, but they had not received His message.

Peace-maker – one who brings, calls in, invites, facilitates, makes peace in others having first received the peace of God in his own heart, not someone who simply makes peace between two parties. So this is much more than being a mediator. It is bringing in the presence of God Himself into the situation, because he himself is indwelt by God. Our trust is totally in Jesus of whom it was prophesied, 'The punishment which brought us peace was upon Him' (**Isaiah 53:5**). He is our source of peace (**Ephesians 2:14-18**). It is His death which puts to death our hostility. He is the reconciler, and we are His representatives.

Who can be a peace-maker?

Someone who is at peace themselves, who has been forgiven, and has forgiven, and desires to see God's will done fully. Otherwise they may speak right words but their spirit will communicate something else. It's possible to have 'peace on the lips, war in the heart'! (**Psalm 55:21**)

Reason they are blessed –

“ for they shall be called sons of God.” Literally “for they *and they alone* shall be called sons of God.”

Why is that?

Because they will bear their Father's likeness. Matthew 5:24 “Be like your Father...” It has always been God's nature to be a reconciler. That's why the cross was planned 'before the foundation of the world.' God has paid the ultimate price to be a reconciler. His plan has always been that through Jesus He would 'reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross" (**Colossians 1:19-20**). One day, He will 'bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ' (**Ephesians 1:9-10**). And we are co-workers with Him! (**1 Corinthians 3:9**)

We need to see this in the light of the former beatitudes. Why does it come towards the end of this list? Is its position significant? Why did Jesus not start with this?

Where did He start?

Matthew 5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

‘Poor in spirit’ – the word used here is of *someone who is so poor that he cannot help himself in any way, but has to depend totally on someone else's kindness*. This person is really poor, helpless, destitute...

Why did Jesus start here?

The first step to blessedness is the realisation of one's spiritual helplessness. All service for God needs to start at the place of realising our total dependence on God.

This was true of Jesus Himself (**John 5:19,30**). These verses are shocking. Could the Son of God really not do anything by Himself? If it was true of Him, how much more is it true of us?!

The poor in spirit believe Jesus when He said “Without me you can do nothing” (**John 15:5**). Most of us don't really believe this if we are honest – we feel we can do quite a lot ourselves but of course it would be better with Jesus' help. Let's look at the context: it's of bearing fruit, much fruit, fruit that will last. So Jesus is not saying we are paralysed, incapable of doing anything, but He's saying that in spite of much

activity, without Him we will not produce anything of real value, and nothing that will have lasting effects. We certainly can't change anyone's heart!

The poor in spirit realise that Jesus is their only hope. They put no confidence in their own flesh (**Philippians 3:3**) but have total confidence in Jesus (**2 Corinthians 3:5-6**). They are not despairing, incompetent people who are passive, feeling there is nothing at all that they can do, but rather that they can do everything through Christ. (**Philippians 4:13**)

The reason they are blessed?

“the kingdom of heaven belongs to them (literally. *and only to them*)”

Why?

Because they are ready to come totally under the rule of the King. They realise that the prince of this world can offer them nothing, and they can do nothing of themselves. They gladly lift up their heads and open the gates of their lives for the King of Glory to come in! (**Psalm 24:7-10**)

The relationship to being a peace-maker

The poor in spirit realise how impossible it will be to change anything without God's intervention. Human ideas and efforts will not have any lasting success. Dialogue and debate will not change anyone's heart and remove evil desires. But in their own powerlessness they have hope, because with God all things are possible (**Mat 19:26; Luke 1:37**) .

Matthew 5:4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

Mourn. Denotes *grieving, an inner mourning, not necessarily seen outwardly*. This is not someone weeping and wailing but someone who feels a deep inner sadness – sadness because God's will is not being done on earth as it is in heaven. It is grieving a loss of what might have been, if only..... It is an inner groaning, mourning for the state of the human heart (starting with their own), for the state of the nation,....mourning because of the injustice, pain, suffering, division, conflict.....

Who mourns?

1) God

We are actually sharing God's sufferings as He grieves over the world (**Genesis 6:6**). 'His heart was full of pain.' **Isaiah 42:14** is amazing. God says He will groan like a woman in labour! There is a similar Scripture in **Jeremiah 48:30-32** where God says He weeps for them. This helps us understand what is meant by 'the fellowship of His sufferings' (**Philippians 3:10**).

2) His people.

There is a place for lament. In **Jeremiah 9:1, 17-18, Ezekiel 19:1, and Amos 5:1** God calls His people to take up a lament because of the terrible state of the nation. Jeremiah deeply mourns for his people. See also whole book of Lamentations, especially **Lamentations 2:18-19; 3:49-51; 4:1-2**.

3) Creation

Man's sin even affects creation itself (**Hosea 4:1-3**) and even creation is groaning (**Romans 8:22**) waiting 'in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed' (**v 19**). That means creation is waiting for people who are going to behave like children of God.

Yet this mourning in Matthew 5 is not the mourning of despair but mourning which embraces the grief and turns it into intercession. It is not afraid to face issues squarely and admit the need. It has no place for cheap triumphalism. It knows that God must intervene – there is no other answer. But there is hope. **2 Corinthians 1:5** says, "For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows."

The reason they are blessed?

"They shall be comforted." Literally, *God shall come alongside them.*

This is a wonderful promise. He comes alongside us to speak words of encouragement and comfort. He is still on the throne! And He will receive our intercession and turn it into blessing.

In many places, God promises to be our comforter (**Isaiah 49:13; 51:3,12; 66:13**). He is able to comfort us because He knows what He is able to do. Jesus has already paid the price to redeem the world.

Romans 8:17 says that if we suffer with Him we can also share in His glory.

The relationship to being a peace-maker

Unless we hear God's heart and grieve for the conflict and division between people created in God's image, we will not be motivated to become peace-makers. Complacency and self-interest will paralyse us. But as we listen to God's heart and hear His grief and His desires for change, we can join with Him in intercession and in action to see things happen.

Matthew 5:5 "Blessed are meek, for they will inherit the earth."

Literally, Blessed are *the humble strong*; it is they, *and they only*, shall inherit the earth.

'Meek' The Greek word = **a virtue born in strength of character**. It is NOT weakness but a **humble strength, & gentleness. Strength under control**. Meekness is chiefly and primarily towards God – a willingness to accept God's dealings with us without resisting but also towards man. However *it includes the ability to get angry at the right time, in the right measure, and for the right reason.*

Jesus asked us to learn from Him because He was meek (**Matthew 11:29**). All the above is perfectly epitomised in Jesus. He was definitely not weak, but did live His

whole life in total submission to His Father's will. There are times when we see great gentleness in Him, like when He dealt with the woman caught in adultery. He also showed incredible humility as He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey when He had every right to ride in as a conquering king.

But He was able to get angry with the Pharisees when He saw injustice and a complete lack of compassion, and He was no less meek when He drove the money-changers out of the temple.

Meekness is choosing not to retaliate when people deal badly with us. It is coming in the opposite spirit believing that love is stronger than hate. **Romans 12:21** says, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Love is the strongest power in the universe! It has the power to transform even the most rebellious hearts.

The world does not understand meekness at all. The teaching on true greatness in **Mark 10:42-45** is shocking in our world. Leading by taking on the form of a servant?! **Philippians 2:5-11** gives us a vivid picture of a humble life. He kept going down further and further till it was impossible to go any lower. But as a result, God exalted Him to the highest place! (**Colossians 2:15**) It is significant to note that Jesus disarmed the principalities and powers by becoming totally vulnerable to them! The teaching on 'turning the other cheek' (**Matthew 5:39**) makes no worldly sense at all, but Christians are not of the world and do not think the way the world does.

The meek are not the aggressors who take by force what they think they deserve. This is not fighting for our human rights (which had gone crazy in the West) but submission to Jesus' higher way. **1 Peter 3:4** says that a gentle and quiet spirit is of great value in God's sight. It is one of the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:23**).

The reason they are blessed?

"for they, and only they, shall inherit the earth".

Why? Because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. We are told this in many places (like **1 Peter 5:5**).

This is **not** what the world believes! They believe it is only the aggressive people who get to possess the earth. They try to take things by force, but end up possessing nothing of real worth. Read **Psalms 37:10-11**. It has the same message. The meek shall inherit the earth as a possession because they will receive it as a gift from God Himself – now, not just in the future. Other wonderful promises are seen in **Psalms 147:6; 149:4; Isaiah 29:19**.

The relationship to being a peace-maker.

It is crucial to have the right attitude if we are to be peace-makers – meek, humble, gentle, gracious. Our trust is in God and His ways of doing things, not the humanistic insisting on our rights. If we want to be peace-makers we need God on our side, not opposing us!

Mathew 5:6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled.”

Literally “Blessed are those who *continually* hunger and thirst for righteousness and justice, for they will be fully satisfied.”

Hunger and thirst are very strong sensations. When we feel them they become foremost in our minds. They take priority over everything else. This is not something half-hearted, a mild interest. “It would be nice if we had a bit more righteousness around”. This is desperation. Our very lives depend on receiving food and water. If we don’t get it, we die! Is this how we feel about the need for righteousness in our lives and in our communities/nations?

Righteousness means *man in a right relationship with God (and therefore with his fellow-man and with creation); what is right, justice, what God desires*. This is not a righteousness that can be earned, something I strive for, but something I receive as a gift.

Psalm 45:7 is a prophetic passage about Jesus that tells us that He loved righteousness and hated wickedness.

The meaning of the word here is *continually* hunger and thirst. This is a lifestyle, not something we feel now and again. If we hunger and thirst after righteousness we will want to speak out against sins and injustice. Hungering after righteousness does not cover over and condone things that are wrong. Of course we cannot do this unless we are living righteous lives ourselves, the righteousness that comes by faith in Jesus. But though we are intolerant of sin and every form of evil, it is important to note that we are also called to embrace and give grace to the sinner.

The reason they are blessed?

They will be fully satisfied. This is full of hope! We will not hunger and thirst in vain – God promises it! Our hungering and thirsting is received as a powerful intercession which gives God access to our situation. The Holy Spirit hears the groans which cannot be uttered and translates them into prayer (**Romans 8:26-27**). The incense bowls in heaven fill up with the prayers of God’s people and when full, their content is poured out on the earth (**Revelation 8:3-5**).

Matthew 6:33 promises that if we seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness, then everything else will be given to us as well. **Psalm 34:15** says that ‘The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and His ears are attentive to their cry.’

Hosea 10:12 urges us to ‘Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unploughed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord until he comes and showers righteousness on you.’

The relationship to peace-making

Isaiah 32:17-18 says that ‘the fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.’

The only foundation of true peace is righteousness. Any other peace which accepts and tolerates evil is not worth having and is a false peace. “They dress the wounds of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace’ they say, when there is no peace” (**Jeremiah 6:14**). There is a similar verse in **Ezekiel 13:10**, speaking of putting whitewash over flimsy walls.

Being a peace-maker is not taking a job with an NGO in order to make money. It’s because of a burning desire in our hearts to see the righteousness of God become evident in our situations.

Matthew 5:7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”

‘Merciful’. This is the only place this particular adjective is used. It means *empathising with someone, suffering with him the consequences of his sin and doing everything possible to relieve the tragic results.*

There could be a danger that hungering and thirsting for righteousness could create in us a judgemental attitude towards all who don’t practice righteousness. It’s so easy to judge those who disappoint our expectations. So it’s not surprising that the next beatitude is ‘Blessed are the **merciful**.’

The word comes from same root used in **Hebrews 2:17** which describes Jesus as our faithful, merciful High Priest, because He understands us fully. He became like us in every respect, and was not condemning or judgemental but sympathetic and made atonement for our sins. In v10, it says He was ‘made perfect through sufferings’ (that is, brought to fullness of perfection and maturity) through *suffering*. Was this the preparation for being merciful? What does this mean for us? God wants to redeem our suffering to make us merciful people.

The word here is the *continually merciful* – one for whom mercy is a way of life not occasional acts of mercy.

We can either live in a place of mercy and grace or of law and judging. We must choose. It’s one or the other. It is not possible to have a foot in each camp. If we choose judgement (law), **Galatians 3:10** shows us clearly that law requires a 100% commitment.

Let’s look at how I will respond to someone who has offended me, depending on whether I am living in a place of judgement, or a place of mercy (adapted from *Experiencing the Father’s Embrace* by Jack Frost).

Judgement

I condemn you
I demand my rights for retribution
I stress guilt and demand justice
I want you to get what you deserve
I use accusatory thoughts and words

Mercy

I forgive you
I let go of my rights for retribution
I declare innocence
I give you an undeserved gift
I use edifying thoughts and words

I care nothing about your pain
I want the worst for you
I have 'written you off'
I criticise
I blame others
I reject and dishonour those who hurt me
Discernment leads to judging
I want to see you cursed

I sympathise and share your pain
I want the best for you
I have hope for your future
I encourage
I see my own fault first
I accept and honour everyone
Discernment leads to intercession
I want to see you blessed

The reason they are blessed?

"They, and only they, will receive mercy".

Let's look again at the Law of Sowing and Reaping (Galatians 6:7) and see what I reap when I sow judgement and when I sow mercy:

Judgement

I get the judgement I deserve
(**Matthew 7:1-2**)
I reap the law and release a
self-imposed curse.
(**Psalm 109:17-19; Matthew 5:22-26**)
Anxiety, stress-related disease
Wounds remain unhealed
I live in bondage
I identify and agree with the Accuser
and do his work
(**Revelation 12:10-11**)

Mercy

I receive mercy
(**Matthew 5:7; 6:14**)
I reap grace and release God's blessing
(**1 Peter 3:9-13; Matthew 5:11-12**)
Rest, peace and divine health
I experience healing and wholeness
I live in freedom
I become like my heavenly Father
and do His work
(**Luke 6:36**)

This is serious stuff!

There is only one safe place to take our judgements – to the cross of Christ. That is where the sin of the world was judged. Jesus made full atonement for them all instead of condemning the guilty. Here He became a curse for us and so is able to deliver us from the curse living under law (**Galatians 3:13**).

The relationship to peace-making

It's clear from the above that God can never use me as peace-maker if I harbour judgement in my heart. I need the wisdom that comes from above which is full of mercy. (**James 3:17-18**)

Matthew 5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God"

Alternate translation: The Divine life is offered to those whose home is clean on the inside. Such people will know the very presence of God and see His face."

'Pure' = *clean from the pollution and guilt of sin*. **'Heart'** = *centre & source of all inner life, thinking, feeling, volition*.

We need a pure heart because we are told in **Jeremiah 17:9-10** that the ‘heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure’. The problem is seen in **v 5** where it tells us that the one who turns away from Lord is cursed. So the heart that is desperately wicked is the one that does not want God or His truth or His ways. **Matthew 15:18-19**: It is out of the heart that everything issues. What is already in our heart will come out of our mouth.

Psalm 24:3-4 ‘Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.’ An idol is anything which takes the place in our lives that should be given to God. The One who said ‘I am the Truth’ hates all falsehood.

Our state is so bad that we are told in **Exodus 33:20** that ‘No-one can see God and live’ because ‘Your eyes are too pure to look on evil (**Habakkuk 1:13**). That means we need to die to our sinful self in order to see God.

Jeremiah 31:12 also tells us that our wounds are incurable, yet in **vs 17** God promises to heal us. ‘Beyond cure’ obviously means by human effort, but with God there is hope. It has to be the miraculous work of God. **1 John 1:9** says that ‘If we confess our sin he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’ Only the blood of Jesus can cleanse the corrupted, contaminated heart. It is not a once-for-all cleansing, but a continuous cleansing that we need as we seek to ‘throw off everything that hinders and the sin which so easily entangles’ (**Hebrews 12:2**).

The reason they are blessed?

‘They shall see God’. We will see the Unseen God! What does this mean? We shall certainly see Him face to face in heaven – that is a firm promise (**1 Corinthians 13:13; Isaiah 33:17**). But this refers to something here in this life too.

Ephesians 1:18 We shall see Him with the eyes of our hearts and know Him.

2 Corinthians 4:18 ‘So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but what is unseen’. The purer our hearts are the more we will see Him as He really is.

When the first (Russian) spaceman went up into space during the communist regime, an atheistic teacher in a Russian school mockingly said to the children, “He went right up into the sky, but he didn’t see God anywhere!” A brave little girl put her hand up. “Please, miss, did he have a clean heart? My Bible says that only those who have a clean heart will be able to see Him”.

The relationship with being a peace-maker

We have probably already been deeply convicted of the need for our hearts to be cleansed of every judgemental attitude, of all bitterness and unforgiveness, pride and self-righteousness; aggressiveness; complacency and apathy. These will block us from being peace-makers. We also need to have our hearts cleansed of all impure motives for being in this ministry (**1 Chronicles 28:9; Proverbs 16:2; 1 Corinthians 4:5**).

We have seen that our hearts are deceitful, so we may think that we are in this ministry because we love God and want to do His will. But the real reason could be that we want to prove something. Maybe we have low self-esteem and feel we have

little value, so we could use facilitating seminars on reconciliation to try to prove our value to ourselves, to others, even to God.

Can you think of anything else that our hearts need to be cleansed of to become effective peace-makers?

Matthew 5:9 “Blessed are the peace-makers for they shall be called sons of God”.

Having gone through all the above preparation and heart cleansing, we are ready to be peace-makers. As we have seen, being a peace-maker exposes sin in order to deal with it. But not everyone is happy with peace-makers because their worldview is disturbed. Not everyone wants righteousness. They would rather hold on to their prejudice, hate, unjust privileges etc. The peace-maker challenges this, and shows people a better way. Satan will not be happy because he loses power in people's lives. The result may well be persecution.

Matthew 5:10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”.

Jesus warned us that if He experienced persecution, so will we (**John 15:18-21**). **2 Timothy 3:12** says that everyone who wants to live a godly life will be persecuted. This world is hostile to God and His principles and ways. “We will not have this King to rule over us!”

The reason for being blessed

‘for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’ In **v13** we are told *‘Great is your reward in heaven.’*

In **1 Peter 4:11-14** it says not to be surprised if we go through suffering and trial. It also says, “If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.” Amazing words! What does this mean in practice? Have any of you experienced this?

The link between the beatitudes which prepare us to be peace-makers: (overview)

Those who know they are **poor in spirit** are the ones who will depend totally on God, knowing that they cannot change people's hearts and stop conflict, but God can.

As they listen to His heart they **mourn** because the will of God is not being done in their nations, communities, as it is in heaven. But they also receive His comfort and His hope.

Because of this they are able to have an attitude of **meekness and humility**, but also the **strength** to do something about the situation.

The **humble strong** are not weak and passive; they have been promised that they will inherit the earth (their nations, communities) so they will **hunger and thirst for righteousness**.

But in their **hunger and thirst for righteousness** they are careful to have **merciful hearts** because this will be the fruit of their quest for righteousness, to be like their Father.

The **merciful** will have **clean hearts**, free of judgement, and they will receive God's mercy and thus will qualify as **peace-makers**.

Not everyone welcomes **peace-makers** if it means exposing sin first, and so **persecution** is a real possibility. But they rejoice, because their reward is very great.

Blessed are you, dear peace-makers, for you shall be called sons of God.