

The Arena, Not The Sidelines: Peacemakers

Matthew 5:9–12 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

What is a peacemaker? The Hebrew term (Shalom) means “complete or whole” at it’s core. But sometimes the context speaks of something that lost it’s completeness or wholeness and has been restored. Peace may be like a calm sea. Peace may also be a calm sea AFTER a storm. “Peace, be still” is what He said. Sometimes you’ve got to go through a storm to experience peace. Peacemaking won’t always be peaceful. Getting into the arena of conflict. “Peace does” is the meaning of peace makers. This doesn’t naturally happen - you have to make it.

Now, think about Jesus. He lived in an occupied militarized zone. Try to appreciate their environment and mindset. It’s your ancestral land, but you’re being occupied and ruled by a people you’ll never meet from a land you’ll probably never visit. Their presence, soldiers, and tax system rule over you. You think we have political frustration? Can you imagine? At least we can vote people in and out. You learn how to make it through a frustrating 4 to 8 year period with “the other guy.” Not the same at all. Perspective is important. The Jewish community fractured over how to respond to this reality.

Social dynamics that day? Outside the average male/female Jewish believers were four main sects within the Jewish community: Summary taken from a podcast: <https://bibleproject.com/podcasts/what-does-it-mean-make-peace-beatitudes-pt-4/>

- **Sadducees:** They were the elite priests/high priests. Think noble/wealthy land owners. Basically, wealthy biblical scholars with political pull. (Caiaphas, the High Priest, was a Sadducee). Will work with Rome to secure their political position. Jesus called them a “brood of vipers” in Matthew 3:7. They didn’t believe in angels, the resurrection, or the spirit (Matthew 22:23; Acts 23:8), and acknowledged only the books of the Law (Genesis-Deuteronomy). They accused Jesus of disrupting the peace (Luke 23:5). For them, the way to bring peace was to kill Jesus.
- **Pharisees:** “Boots on the ground” teachers. They accepted the whole law (not just the first five books). They had a respect for oral tradition. In our modern setting, the Pharisees would be the local preachers, while the Sadducees would be professors at prestigious seminaries/colleges, holding significant sway over the theological community. Could be known for their hypocrisy and need to be seen. Not all were bad or rejected Jesus (think Nicodemus). These are all generalities. However, as a whole, they saw Jesus as a troublemaker who needed to be eradicated.
- **Essenes (Qumran):** This community, also referred to as the Qumran community (koom-ron), lived by the Dead Sea. They separated themselves from the other groups and were known for their asceticism. A very disciplined group that took issue with everyone else. Very community-driven, some even practiced celibacy. Followed the Torah more strictly than their peers. Big on ritual purity and the law. They had their own interpretations of the law. They believed the end times were near, and they were preparing for judgment. This group is connected to the Dead Sea

Scrolls. Their way of dealing with conflict was to run and isolate. To many, you may be thinking, "they're on to something." This is why we all want to buy land somewhere far, far away... haha.

- **Zealots:** Think radical hotheads. Military faction. We don't know whether they were organized at that time. Think Simon, the Zealot. Within 150-200 years, you had the Maccabean Revolts. A leader, Antiochus Epiphanies, wanted to join with Rome. He was willing to sacrifice pigs on the altar in the Temple. He put up a golden eagle to Zeus. These Zealous-types get super riled up. They band together to form a military, and they win. And they cleanse the Temple, they cleanse the society, they restore proper worship to the Temple. This is their peacemaking. And Zealots are clashing with other Jewish groups. So they're certainly opposed to the Roman occupation. But they're opposed to the tax collectors who work with the Romans, and to the Sadducees and the high priests who are in bed with the Romans. And they're opposed to any Pharisee who disagrees. They lack harmony with anyone who does not share their own mindset.

How did they make peace?

- Sadducees made peace through politics.
- Pharisees made peace through control.
- Essenes made peace through withdrawal.
- Zealots made peace through war.

Peacemakers don't withdraw. They live among conflict with the goal to reconcile, whether that's with their own enemy or on behalf of two other parties. And as Jesus points out, there would be trouble and persecution. To be part of God's family, we must face opposition like Jesus. We must be ready for rejection. People will not like you.

It's wild. Consider Matthew 10:16-25. You'd think the public would love and appreciate the efforts of Jesus' apostles. Quite the opposite. But this is wrong, because it doesn't feel right. When you've upset someone, and you're in their crossfire, it can feel wrong. Is this what "heaven on earth" should look like? So, we've got to remind ourselves of what Jesus taught and what He lived through.

However, sometimes we don't do well in our attempt to be peacemakers. Sometimes it's our attitude, choice of words, anger, impatience, haughtiness, etc., that backfire and lead some to feel they're just experiencing righteous persecution. Some may speak badly of you because you're behaving badly. If that's true, they're certainly not going to buy what you're selling. Selling reconciliation when your behavior and attitude only push others away. This has caused some in the church to run away from conflict because they've seen it handled so poorly, but overreacting isn't helpful either.

Yet, some spread the gospel message with grace and love, and it doesn't save them from accusations and conflict. Jesus executed it perfectly, and they killed Him. Some people say they have a hard time engaging in conflict because they've seen it go so badly, when the real reason is that they prefer to be liked by men and/or are afraid of men. Jesus also addressed this with His apostles in Matthew 10:26-33.

There's a reality behind what Jesus is saying. It's not that He doesn't want peace, but rather, He knows what will happen when peace is offered through conflict resolution. Now we think of passages

such as Matthew 10:34-39 (John 3:16-21). Yes, we're going to be accused and misunderstood. How true that was of Jesus!

But brethren, it is so worth the humility, self-sacrifice, and pain. First of all, we're looking forward to a time when God's peacemakers will be rewarded with complete peace and harmony. Things will be restored, and all creation will enjoy perfect togetherness. This is the basic concept of peace. Secondly, because we're bringing a fraction of what's to come to earth now. Have you ever engaged in peacemaking? Perhaps you've committed to studying the word with someone outside of Christ, and you are blessed to see the day they turn from their earthly lifestyle and "call on the name of the Lord." Perhaps you've engaged a family member or close friend, and through the process, you experienced a restored relationship. Have you ever seen this among brethren? Have you helped others come together? Or like we've been discussing the past two weeks: in our marriages? Truly, it is a piece of heaven on earth.

These beginning chapters warm us up to Jesus, and then we see Him in action. He embodies what He preaches. He will reign as King, and He sets out the expectation for citizen character. So, if you want to know how Jesus confronted conflict, just keep reading the gospel accounts. There are times when a sharp rebuke was necessary, but Jesus is inclusive, gentle, merciful, helpful, and humble. He confronted conflict with meekness, humility, and forgiveness. He'll do this from the heart and with purity. He was hungry for it! Yes, then you come to the end of Matthew, and we see Him persecuted to the point of death, but it ultimately concludes with a resurrection. So, with this in mind, let's encourage one another this way:

- Peacemaking happens in the arena of conflict.
- Peacemaking must come from humble and pure hearts.
- Peacemaking requires our obedience to God.
- Peacemaking loves reconciliation.
- Peacemaking demands patience, sacrifice, mercy, and forgiveness.
- Peacemaking is rewarded both now and later.