

Day 39 First Things First...

Matthew 5:9 (ERV) Great blessings belong to those who work to bring peace. God will call them his sons and daughters.

Since Cain, mankind has been breeding animosity, envy and hatred for our fellow man. This animosity leads to quarreling, fighting, violence and, on a grander scale, war between groups, tribes and nations. In the Madagascar movie, King Julian, the self-proclaimed king of the lemurs, makes a statement about the people while he points to human skeletons hanging in their parachutes from a tree: "They are not a very lively bunch!" Fortunately for him, he didn't meet living ones, because he will find: "They are not a very peaceful bunch!"

Since the beginning of recorded history, the entire world has been at peace less than eight percent of the time! In 3530 plus years of recorded history, only 286 years saw *peace*, and over 8000 *peace* treaties were made and broken. As I said, "We are not a very peaceful bunch!" James writes: ***"Do you know where your fights and arguments come from? They come from the selfish desires that war within you. 2 You want things, but you do not have them. So you are ready to kill and are jealous of other people, but you still cannot get what you want. So you argue and fight. You do not get what you want, because you do not ask God."* (James 4:1-2 NCV)**

Human nature is selfish and self absorbed, and that nature is the war we fight on the inside. James says because we have this war of "self absorbed selfishness," it leads to fighting, arguing and being willing to do unthinkable things, all in the name of getting what we want. **Jesus' primary mission was not to necessarily make life easier, His primary mission was to redeem mankind from the tyranny of their own evil hearts.** We needed to be set free from the sinful nature that controls us and causes us to behave contrary to God's original intent. Jesus came to make the way for us to have peace with God. Until we make peace with God and accept Him as the One to govern our lives, we cannot have or even know true peace. **Peace is not possible without Christ!** Isaiah prophesied and said, *"For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.' 7 His government and its peace will never end."* **Isaiah 9:6-7a (NLT)**

As long as the government of man is left on the shoulders of unregenerate man, there will be no peace. Only when we place the governing of our lives completely on the shoulders of Christ, will we experience peace. Peace is not possible without the Prince of peace. Peace is not possible without the government of Christ. It is only in Christ's government that peace will never end. All we have to do is look at the world; the world lives in constant conflict and there are upheavals everywhere.

Did Jesus come to bring peace on the earth? The answer is yes, but it is an answer that must be qualified. When Jesus tells us that we are to be peacemakers, does He place the primary emphasis on us making peace in the world? Let's hear what Jesus has to say: ***"Never think I have come to bring peace upon the earth. No, I have not come to bring peace but a sword! For I have come to set a man against his own father, a daughter against her own mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be those who live in his own house."* (Matthew 10:34-36 PHILLIPS)**

Jesus says He has come to bring a sword, not peace. **Jesus is not talking about a literal sword. He is using "sword" as an analogy for something that cuts and separates.** He is talking in the context of this

passage about the challenges that His disciples will face and the persecution they will have to endure. **He is encouraging them to hold onto their confession of Him, regardless of the price, even if it costs them their lives.** He warns that some in their family might hate the fact that they have decided to follow Him and that might bring separation: meaning, the sword. So the disciples, and that includes us, are being admonished that not even family should stand in the way of us following Christ. **Our devotion is to Him, first and foremost.** We desire to have peace between us and others. We work towards peace with others, but sometimes peace is not possible because of the nature of unregenerate man.

When Jesus spoke these words: ***“blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God,”*** He was well aware of what His audience experienced in their lives concerning peace. They were under the brutal rule of the Roman Empire, and part of that oppressive rule was the fact that they could be conscripted by any Roman soldier to carry things or even suffer the loss of personal belongings. After King Herod died in 4 BC, there was an uprising in Jerusalem by some of the Jews during the Passover. Archelaus sent a delegation to squelch the uprising but some of them were stoned by the Jews. So Archelaus sent in his soldiers, which then massacred 3,000 Jewish worshippers. When a group of Jews went to Rome and asked Caesar Augustus to appoint someone else to govern them, Archelaus hunted them and their families down and killed all of them. Pilate murdered some people from Galilee as they were offering sacrifices. Jesus’ audience was used to abuse, corruption, unbridled violence against them, and they were under constant barrage of political turmoil; some of these things happening in Jesus’ lifetime. **These hearers of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, of all people, needed peace, yet Jesus’ preaching addresses them personally, and to top that off, He tells them to greet these oppressors with a friendly smile, to pray for, bless and do good to all these people who are the very cause of their pain! What could be more important than peace for their nation? What could be more important than ridding them of the oppressive rule of the Romans? This is why the Messiah is supposed to come, to set us free from this political oppression, right?**

How would Jesus answer that question? How would He respond when He is confronted with what is happening? We don’t have to wonder because Luke records it for us. ***“About this time Jesus was informed that Pilate had murdered some people from Galilee as they were offering sacrifices at the Temple. 2 ‘Do you think those Galileans were worse sinners than all the other people from Galilee?’ Jesus asked. ‘Is that why they suffered? 3 Not at all! And you will perish, too, unless you repent of your sins and turn to God. 4 And what about the eighteen people who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them? Were they the worst sinners in Jerusalem? 5 No, and I tell you again that unless you repent, you will perish, too.’”***

Jesus knows something we ought to know, but sometimes choose to forget, and that is, until the human heart has been changed by the God of peace, nothing will change in our world. Jesus says, “You are worried about Pilate’s heart, I am concerned about your heart.” This might be hard to read, but please bear with me with an open mind and heart. **Jesus’ primary concern is not for the world to have peace, but for the world to repent. That includes you and I!** Personal repentance is much higher on God’s agenda than political comfort. Jesus makes it clear that you could have everything you want politically and still perish for eternity. **So He places our peace with God as the highest priority, even knowing that we might have to bear and suffer in ways that are unjust, ungodly and unfair.** Ask yourself this question: “Would you prefer a wonderful, comfortable life here and now, or an incredibly wonderful life for all of eternity?” Why does Jesus focus on eternity? **Because He, better than anyone else, knows that to trade our souls for temporary pleasure or comfort, is the worst thing that can happen to us.** It is terrible to be under a brutal political agenda. It is horrible to suffer because of who rules us. It is tragic when bad things happen; such as a tower collapsing and killing people. It is

horrendous when people get murdered while they are worshipping. All these things are wrong and evil. For Jesus, it is not so much the fact that we all have the possibility of dying in an unjust way, but that we would die without having repented from our sin. **Because Jesus knows that it would be worse dying without Him, than living in an unjust world.**

First things first, through Jesus, we must make peace with God and receive His peace. We cannot expect peace to come to the earth if peace has not invaded our hearts. Jesus is not ignorant, insensitive, uninterested, aloof or oblivious to the world's pain and suffering. He is the Divine Physician; He knows our true condition. Jesus knows what the symptoms are and what the root causes are for our pain. He did not come to treat the symptoms; He came to cure us from what afflicts us. He is not medicating us to ease our pain and dull our senses. He desires to heal us completely, so He is uncompromisingly truthful, knowing that some of us might reject our need for open heart surgery. Nevertheless, He offers us a new heart because it is the only way to a new life filled with His peace.

Reflection and Prayer:

- According to Jesus, human beings are not naturally good, and if you are a human that includes you. **Have you ever thought that your heart is what is wrong with the world?**
- **Repentance is always before peace. Have you allowed Jesus to set you free from the tyranny of your own evil heart?**
- **Have you placed the same value on your soul that Jesus does? How does your life reflect that your soul is the most important thing you possess?**
- Personal repentance is much higher on God's agenda, than political comfort. Jesus makes it clear that you could have everything you want politically and still perish for eternity. So He places our peace with God as the highest priority, even knowing that we might have to bear and suffer in ways that are unjust, ungodly and unfair. **What makes this challenging in our current culture? Would you prefer a wonderful, comfortable life here and now, or comfort for all of eternity?**
- **How should we live knowing that personal peace with God is what matters most to Jesus?**