

Sermon Notes for 3/20 - Matthew 5:9 - Always Stirring Up . . .

According to Jesus' teaching in the beatitudes, the defining mark - the key characteristic - of Jesus' followers is being a peacemaker.

We live in a world that is filled with division and alienation.

In a world filled with division, peacemakers are always stirring up peace by accepting and including all people as God's children. Jesus' acceptance of the outcasts of his world is our example.

In a world filled with alienation, peacemakers are always stirring up peace by diffusing the alienation and building bridges across the chasms of alienation. How Jesus dealt with his antagonists is our model. Jesus was not manipulated by their anger. Rather, he held his position, clearly stating the truth by which he lived. Jesus did not react with anger to what others did or said. Rather, He lived out of who he was and the truths that shaped who he was. Jesus did not force his position on his opponents. Rather, he sought to establish conversation and dialogue that would lead to a greater understanding of God's truth. Jesus did not cut off any relationship or abandon any person. Rather, he attempted to stay connected and in relationship.

Peacemaking is about relationships and reconciliation. It is the work of God - and the work of God's children.

Being a peacemaker causes one to be out of step with a world filled with division and alienation.

The Ways of the Kingdom versus the Ways of the World - An Interpretation of the Beatitudes

In the beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) Jesus describes for his followers the kind of person who is a part of the Kingdom of God. His description of the children of the Kingdom is in terms of attitudes (5:3-6), not morals, in terms of relationships (5:7-9), not religious behavior. The ways of the Kingdom person are in marked contrast to those who follow the ways of the world.

The poor in spirit (5:3) focus upon the inner realms of life, recognizing the condition of their heart and acknowledging that - in their own strength - they cannot live the ways Jesus taught. By contrast, those who follow the ways of the world focus upon externals and appearances, declaring certain beliefs (doctrine), behavior (morals), and ritual (worship) to be right and all others as wrong. Those who mourn (5:4) - facing the inner reality of their heart - grieve what they contribute to the pain and chaos and alienation in the lives of others. By contrast, those who follow the ways of the world use its standards

of right and wrong to focus upon what others do wrong. Focusing upon the wrong of others allows one to ignore the wrong in one's own life.

The meek (5:5) are those who bring their inability and struggle to live the ways Jesus taught to God, placing themselves under the power of God's transforming grace. By contrast, those who follow the ways of the world seek to manipulate and control others by bartering acceptance for conformity while handing out condemnation and rejection to those who do not conform to the accepted standards of right and wrong.

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (5:6) - out of a passionate desire for healing and wholeness - seek to learn and grow in the ways of God. By contrast, those who follow the ways of the world seek to fill the inner emptiness with power and position and wealth and things.

The merciful (5:7) are compassionate toward and understanding of the needs and struggles of others. This compassionate response is rooted in their willingness to deal honestly with their own need and struggle. By contrast, those who follow the ways of the world - focusing upon externals and appearances - are critical and judgmental and condemning.

The pure in heart (5:8) are open and genuine in their relationships because they distrust the deceitful nature of their hearts. By contrast, those who follow the ways of the world are pretentious and deceptive, putting on an appearance that masks the inner motives of the heart.

The peacemakers (5:9) seek to manage themselves and their reactions to others so that can stay in dialogue and relationship with others in a pursuit of truth. By contrast, those who follow the ways of the world divide people into groups, becoming increasingly distrustful of and reactionary to those who are different - resulting in conflict and alienation.

Because the ways of the Kingdom are so different from the ways of the world, those who live the Kingdom ways will be out of step in the world. As such, they will be a threat to those who follow the ways of the world. They will be misunderstood, maligned, attacked, and rejected. They will be persecuted for righteousness sake (5:10-12). Yet, by being so radically different, those who live the ways of the Kingdom will be like light, salt, a city on the hill (5:13-16).