

# Meeting With Christ

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Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

Yves I-Bing Cheng, M.D., M.A.

Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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## BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

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### Matthew 5:9

The Bible is very much concerned about peace. The Lord Jesus makes mention of those who make peace in the Beatitudes. This is what He says in Matthew 5:9.

*Matthew 5:9. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

### Peace according to Jesus

When the Lord Jesus speaks of peacemaking, we have to make sure that we understand what He means by 'making peace.' Let's first clarify what He does not mean. Peacemaking, from Jesus' point of view, should not be defined in a political or social sense. It might include that, but it is not the primarily meaning of the peacemaking mentioned in the Scriptures.

What do we mean by this? Well, let's suppose that there are two countries at war with each other. We want the war to stop. Should we initiate a diplomatic process by which these two countries would be invited to consider reconciliation? That would be peacemaking, we think. This is a noble desire indeed, but that's not exactly peacemaking in the Lord's sense. This doesn't mean that you should not get involved in making peace at the political level. But you should understand that the Lord Jesus expects something different when He talks about peacemaking. It is not political. It is not social. It is primarily spiritual. In the Lord's teaching, peacemaking is first and foremost a spiritual activity.

As Christians, shouldn't we get involved in social and political issues? Certainly! There is nothing in the Bible that prevents you from doing that. But you must realize that when you deal with problems at the social level and at the political level, you are only dealing with the symptoms. Political and social issues are only the symptoms of something much deeper in our society. Taking care of the symptoms does not automatically remove the problem. Taking a medicine to lower your fever when you have malaria will not remove the infection from your body. You have to treat the disease. You have to go to the root of the problem.

### Dealing with the corruption of the heart

What is the cause of all wars? For this question, you have to go into the human heart. If you want to deal with a problem, you have to go right to the heart of the matter. And the root of the problem is the corruption of the human heart. That's where we have to start. When the human heart is healed of its sinfulness, then the symptoms of the disease will disappear. The Scripture provides a spiritual answer to the problems of this world and assumes that most human problems originate at the

spiritual level. When Jesus says, *Blessed are the pure in heart*, He is getting to the root of our problems. He is referring to the impurity, the corruption of our hearts.

If you understand the problem, you treat the problem at its root. In the days when Paul lived, there was a problem of slavery. There were millions and millions of slaves in the Roman Empire. Did Paul condemn slavery? Did he say to the people, 'We must not have this kind of oppression. We must not have man treat another man like a piece of property. We must change the socio-economic situation. We must abolish slavery.' Paul didn't say that. He did not attack slavery. If he had done that, there would have been much bloodshed. You can well imagine the negative response of the slave owners and of the government to such propaganda.

However, Paul was going to abolish slavery by preaching and teaching the gospel in such a way that man's hearts are changed. When your heart is changed, you immediately feel that you cannot treat a fellow human as a piece of property. You realize that all human beings are equal in the sight of God. The gospel did not have to attack slavery. Where the gospel was preached, hearts were transformed. People with changed hearts realize that man could no longer treat fellow man in such an oppressive manner. And therefore, slavery could not be practiced anymore.

You see that when you treat the source of a problem, the symptoms disappear. Slavery was a symptom of man's sinfulness, man's desire to possess another person for his personal benefit. When the heart of man is changed, the desire to buy and sell human beings goes away. Now you begin to understand the strategy of the Bible. Unless people are changed, none of our social and political problems will really be solved.

### **Establishing peace on the basis of righteousness**

We must also understand that peacemaking, from a Christian viewpoint, is not a matter of compromise. It is not appeasement. We want to make peace, yes, but not at any price. Peace is not all that matters. The truth has to prevail. You don't sweep the issues under the carpet in order to have peace. You cannot have real peace unless you deal with the issues on the basis of righteousness. In the Scriptures, peace and righteousness can never be separated. Wherever you see real peace, you will inevitably see righteousness.

That is why you cannot have peace in the presence of sin. Sin is the cause of all disharmony and all discord. Sin is the foundation of every kind of conflict, whether it is within you or outside of you. If you live in sin, you can be sure that you will experience unrest, discomfort, tension, nervousness. Therefore the peacemaking process implies that you deal with sin. If you can see that sin is the ground of all conflict, then you will understand also that in dealing with the conflict, you must deal with sin. Otherwise you are just covering up the issues. And the remedy for sin is righteousness. That is why the peacemaker must be preoccupied with righteousness. It must be his primary concern.

Now, how do you go about dealing with unrighteousness? Well, you can certainly reprove it. You must speak out against sinfulness. This is not going to make you very popular. You have to expect resistance and criticism. That is why in the next Beatitude, the Lord Jesus says, *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake*. Do you see the connection? If you want to make peace, you have to denounce sin. And if you speak out against unrighteousness, some people are going to attack you.

When the Lord Jesus speaks about peace, He is not talking about a superficial peace in which everybody just keeps his mouth shut. Unfortunately so much of the so-called 'peace' in this world and in our relationships is just a sort of 'stand off'. There is an appearance of peace only because everybody ceases fire for a time. You don't shoot and I don't shoot. You don't talk to me. I don't talk to you. We will just have a stand off. Nobody is going to get hurt. But you are still hurting inside of you. The anger is still there, the bitterness, the hate. Can you really call that peace? You stay on your

side of the wall, and I stay on my side, and we will have peace in this way. Is that peace? Don't proclaim 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace. Remember. If you don't deal with sin, there will be no peace. Peace and righteousness cannot be separated.

### **Peace with God and with man**

Now, before you go out there and start denouncing sin, you have to look at yourself first. Do you have what it takes to be a peacemaker? You see, before you try to make peace in this world, you need to have peace within you. You must be able to say that you have established true peace in your own life. You cannot be a peacemaker if you don't have peace in your life. In spiritual terms, what we mean is that you must be at peace with God. You must be reconciled with God. That's what Roman 5:1 talks about. *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Reconciliation with God takes place when you recognize your sinfulness. You repent of your sins and God forgives you. I realize that I don't have inner peace because my life is not clean. It is not righteous. And I ask God to cleanse me, to forgive me. That is how you can begin to build righteousness into your life. The only way you can become a peacemaker is first by changing completely the foundation of your life. God has to transform you from a carnal person to a spiritual person, with a completely new heart within you. In the Bible, this transformation is called 'regeneration'. Then you can make peace in the world because you have been reconciled with God. You have made peace with God.

In order to fulfill your task as a peacemaker, you must be in good stand with the parties that are in conflict. Nobody is going to accept you as a mediator if you don't stand in good terms with one party or the other. A peacemaker is a mediator who stands in good relation with both parties. But more than that, he must love both parties. Peacemaking is a difficult and dangerous task because there is always a risk to get in trouble with both sides. In your effort to make peace, you are likely to be fired on from both sides. No matter what you do, it is only a matter of time before you are accused of partiality. One side will say, 'You are on the other people's side.' And the other side will say, 'No, you are on their side.' And so, you are caught in between and nobody is happy.

### **The love of God in our hearts**

Nothing but genuine love will make us to be true peacemaker. You cannot be a peacemaker in the Lord's sense of the word unless you truly love God and you truly love man. Our desire to reconcile people to God and people to people is born of a genuine love for God and for man. Can we truly say that we love God enough that we want to be a peacemaker? Can we say that we really love man to the extent that we want to be a peacemaker? Just think about your own personal conflicts and you immediately realize that it is not easy. You realize that in order to have such a love for God and such a love for man, God has to change us. Rom. 5:5 says, ... *the love of God has been poured in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.* Unless the love of God is found in our hearts, all this talk about '*Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God*' would only be a dream because it is impossible to apply this teaching. A total transformation of our being has to take place. We need to be regenerated by God.

We realize then that we have to be changed to the extent that we are willing to love God and to love man with our whole heart, even if that man is an enemy. You see, the Lord's teaching here involves the love for the enemy. Matthew 5:44-45 speaks about loving our enemy. It is actually a parallel to our Beatitude.

*Matthew 5:44. But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,*

45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven...

Notice carefully the words in this passage. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of God. The meaning is very similar to *Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God*. Peacemakers are those who love men, even their enemies. Left to ourselves, we just can't do it. The natural man always seeks his own interests and does things his own way. He doesn't know what it means to put other people's interests first. But when we have the love of God in our hearts, we are willing to love them until God changes them completely from their selfishness.

### **The cost of peacemaking**

Being a peacemaker is very costly. Think of the Lord Jesus. How did he make peace? He made peace by the blood of His cross (Colossians 1:20). The cost of being a peacemaker is seen in this way. In order to make peace, you have to overcome sin by love. You recognize that sin is the cause of all conflict. You try to make peace in drawing people away from sin. You have to tell them that sin is the cause of unrighteousness. Not only do you reprove sinfulness, but you have to love the sinners. So you have to do two things at the same time. You reprove their sins, but you also love them. That's what makes peacemaking so difficult.

The Christian who tries to make peace often feels that he is fighting a battle that he is almost sure to lose. He has to establish peace on the foundation of righteousness. He has to show the sinner that sin is bad. He has to reprove him and also love him in such a way that he recognizes that sin is bad. Try to convince him. It is much like trying to convince a child that sweet is bad for his teeth. The child is convinced that sweet is good and you are telling him something that is contrary to his experience. Try to tell a sinner that sin is bad when, all his life, he has been enjoying the pleasures of sin. It is almost impossible!

And what is more, if you persist in your task, you are going to make an awful lot of enemies. People will laugh at you. They might even become hostile towards you. They will say, 'What are you trying to do holy Joe? We have to live in the realities of this world. It's a tough life. That's why I do what I do. Take your holiness somewhere else. You can preach to the monks in the monasteries if you want. But don't bother me with your preaching.'

If you ever touch a sensitive spot in their lives, then you are in trouble. They are going to turn against you as the religious leaders turned against the Lord Jesus and crucified Him. When you are dealing with small matters, they can still smile. But when you start talking about their personal life and their own faults, they are not going to smile anymore. When John the Baptist rebuked king Herod for taking his brother's wife, he ended up in jail for his trouble. And he died in jail. Had he spoken about how the Romans treated the Jews, Herod might still be smiling. But when you talk about his private life and his sins, that's when he is going to take action against you.

Making peace in this world. What a task! When you are calling people to peace, you are actually calling people to a process that involves a complete change of life. It is a new life in which Jesus is going to reign in their lives as He establishes righteousness in their hearts.

### **Sonship**

'Blessed are you who are peacemakers because you will be called sons of God.' God shall acknowledge you as His son. Notice the future tense of this phrase. *They shall be called sons of God*. Here the Lord Jesus is not speaking about a present sonship, but about a future sonship. This is interesting to observe because just a few verses later, we find that the Lord Jesus speaks of the disciples as God's sons. In Matthew 5:16, He says, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may*

see your good works and glorify **your Father** in heaven. If God is already your father, then it follows that you are His sons now.

The Scripture teaches two types of sonship. There is a present sonship and a future sonship. We are His sons now and we will be called His sons in the future. It is very clear that the apostle Paul also makes this distinction. For Paul, the experience of sonship begins when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. He says in Galatians 3:26, *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus*. But that's not all because he speaks of another sonship which will be experienced in the future. Let's read Romans 8:22-23.

*Romans 8:22. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.*

*23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, **waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.***

We, as Christians, are still waiting for our adoption as sons. In that sense, our salvation is not yet complete. So we are God's sons now and not yet completely adopted as His sons. Yes, we have the first fruits of the Spirit. The Spirit of adoption was given to us by which we cry, 'Abba, Father' (Romans 8:15). If we can call God, 'Father', it means that we are His sons. But we are not yet fully His sons. We are still waiting for our adoption. Something is missing for our salvation to be complete. And Paul tells us what is missing: the redemption of our bodies. Our body has not yet been redeemed. In that sense, we have not been fully adopted as God's sons.

Our salvation will be complete at the second coming of Christ. On that day, as the Lord Jesus says in Matthew 5:9, we shall be called 'sons of God' in the full sense of the word. Then will our sonship be complete. Our whole being will be in harmony with the spirit of sonship. So bear in mind that in many ways, the Beatitudes speak of a future salvation. And when the Lord Jesus talks about being called 'sons of God' in Matthew 5, He is speaking about sonship in its ultimate sense. Our full adoption as God's sons will be experienced in the future.

### **Proclaiming the gospel of peace**

This Beatitude tells us that every disciple is called to be a peacemaker. This cannot be done without preaching the message of peace. What is the message of peace? The message of peace is the message of salvation. The proclamation of peace is the same thing as the proclamation of salvation. Let's read Isaiah 52:7.

*Isaiah 52:7. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news,  
who proclaims peace,  
who brings glad tidings of good things,  
who proclaims salvation,  
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!"*

The one who brings good news is the one who proclaims salvation. He is the one who announces peace.

In the NT, in Ephesians 6, Paul says to the Christians that we must put on the helmet. We must put on the breastplate. And on our feet, we must put on the gospel of peace. This means that the way we walk and the way we conduct ourselves should be done with the intention of advancing the gospel of peace. That is the first thing that a peacemaker must do if he wants to make peace in this world.

In conclusion, a peacemaker is basically a messenger of peace who seeks to reconcile God and man, and to reconcile man and man on the foundation of righteousness. When you do this, you have the promise that you will be called sons of God.