

Peacemaking
Stadium Village Church
October 28, 2007

In many places in the Bible we are called to seek God. Isaiah 55:6 says: "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near." I don't know about You, but sometimes when I am going to have a time of reading the Bible and praying, something we often call having our "devotions" or a "quiet time", I long to connect with God. I desire to know that He is speaking to me and that He is hearing my thoughts and requests. We are all on a journey in this life and whether You have been following Jesus Christ for a short time or for many years, there is a desire to be closer yet to God. Even after many years, we desire to know Him better, to be more sure of His existence and His working in our lives. Our journey of faith is really not over until we pass through the portal of death and see Him face to face.

I believe that God calls every human being to seek Him. He gently knocks on the door of our heart, asking us to come and follow Him, to seek Him. He wants us to remove things from our lives that get in the way of totally seeking Him. He calls us to put Him first, even above good things in our lives.

In Jeremiah 27 we read words that God gave to Jeremiah to pass on to the people of Israel who were taken captive to Babylon – present day Iraq. God was telling the people through Jeremiah to settle down in Babylon – have families, plant gardens, live life. But God also called them to seek Him – He said:

¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

God calls us to seek Him above all else, AND He promises that we will not be disappointed if we seek Him with all our hearts – we will find Him.

The reason for bringing this up, is first of all, I was impressed this week when I realized all the times that the Bible mentions "seek God" or "seeking God." The second reason is that it leads us into the topic for today's sermon.

We are coming near the end of a series of sermons that we have entitled, "Copying Christ's Character in Community." We have based this series on the beatitudes – eight statements of Jesus that we find in Matthew chapter 5. Each of these statements proclaims a blessing, a promise of God's favor on people who have various characteristics. The setting for these statements seems to have been Jesus' teaching a crowd of people who were following Him. He had been proclaiming that people should repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Maybe the crowd was wondering: "What must we do to be part of this kingdom?" Maybe this was Jesus response – if you want to be part of God's kingdom, be like this.

Along with each beatitude, we are also looking at the character trait that is portrayed – how was it evident in the life of Christ. We are also encouraging ourselves to practice a particular spiritual discipline in order to incorporate that character trait in our own lives. So far we have looked at fasting, confession of

sins, submission, reading the Bible, showing mercy, and meditation and journaling. I do pray that you are adopting these disciplines into your own lives.

It is a step of faith to practice spiritual disciplines. Some of you are studying the book by Richard Foster – Celebration of Discipline. This book's main theme is to examine several spiritual disciplines that a follower of Jesus should incorporate into their lives. Some of you may be in the class with Margaret Taylor and Chee Soon Tan in which the book by Dallas Willard – Renovation of the Heart – is being studied. Willard has also written a book – The Spirit of Discipline. Willard also advocates adopting spiritual disciplines in order to live a life close to God. But it is a matter of faith – one could practice various disciplines incorrectly – thinking that they will somehow please God and make Him love us more and treat us more kindly. But that is not the purpose of the disciplines – the spiritual disciplines are really ways of opening our lives up to God, trusting that He will work in us through these disciplines to make us more like Jesus Christ and more useful in doing the work He wants us to do. It is something like doing physical exercises in order to be able to play a sport like soccer, baseball, or football. The participants discipline themselves in order to be able to play well in the real game. Spiritual disciplines can help us be prepared to take part in kingdom work, be better equipped to do what God calls us to do. For example, Paul wrote to Timothy:

.....train yourself to be godly. ⁸ For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. 1 Timothy 4:7b-8

It is a matter of faith, believing that if we adopt spiritual disciplines, we are opening our lives to God's working, making us into the people that He desires and that He can use for His work.

We have seen that the eight beatitudes are progressive – the first ones express humility, need, desire for more, while the latter ones describe people who are mature citizens of the kingdom who are serving the King and even suffering for doing so. We have gone through the first six beatitudes and each of these for the most part describe an inner attitude or characteristic – poor in spirit, mourn, meek, hunger and thirst for righteousness, merciful, and pure in heart.

The beatitude for today describes people who are taking an action – making peace.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God “

In past weeks we have talked about the word blessed – it means more than happy – it more the joy that we have because we know that no matter what the situation is like around us, we are in God's care and keeping. We are joyful regardless of circumstance.

The other words or phrases we need to consider in this beatitude are “peacemakers” and “children of God.” Looking at “children of God” first – there is no greater honor humans can receive than to be called children of God. That is what we were created for – God's intent was to reestablish that relationship when He sent Jesus to this world. When we are peacemakers, we become co-laborers with God in His work on this earth. The thought of being called a child of God

should bring us joy beyond comprehension. What more could we ask for than to be an heir of the King of the universe?

In order to consider what is meant by “peacemaker” we need to consider the word peace. In the Old Testament, the word for peace was “shalom” – a word that we still use today. We may sign off on an email or letter, with the word shalom. For the Jews, it had a rich meaning, much more than just the absence of conflict. Rather it expressed the holistic idea of life being good. You have adequate supply of things for living, life is good and you have God’s favor and blessing.

In the New Testament, the Greek word for peace is “*eirene*.” This word originally meant inner peace, but it came to have a more holistic meaning such as the word *shalom* and was used by the New Testament writers to describe several things, including the restored relationship between God and humans. When Jesus uses the word peace, it often refers to the results of His work in bringing forgiveness of our sins and our restored relationship with God. Jesus brought us “peace with God.” Paul even says the Jesus is “our peace.”

Eph 2:14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,

Peace was often tied to salvation – we have peace with God because of what Jesus the Messiah has done.

We may be tempted to think of peacemakers as people who bring peace between people. If we would use the word “peacemaker” today to describe a person, we would probably think of a person who is good at negotiating, bringing two parties in conflict to an agreement that would lead to peace. Certainly, people who are followers of Jesus should be people of peace. Followers of Jesus will have different priorities – they will have a correct view of things that often bring conflict. They will not be hoarders of material things, they will not be proud, they will not insist on having their own way, but they will seek the good of those around them. Therefore, people who are followers of Jesus Christ should be people who are at peace with their neighbors and will be able to help others who are in conflict.

But while followers of Jesus Christ should be people that bring a cessation of conflict, Jesus didn’t promise us a peaceful world. In fact, the “peace” that He was bringing may actually result in conflict between people. The very next beatitude which will be topic for next week’s sermon, predicts that followers of God will actually suffer persecution and suffering. Later in the book of Matthew, Jesus is recorded as saying that

“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to turn “ ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law— *one*’s enemies will be the members of *their* own household.’ Matthew 10:34-36.

Jesus didn’t promise to bring a peaceful world – He did come to BE our peace.

“Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the presence of God.” Jesus Christ is our peace.

When Jesus said “blessed are the peacemakers,” He was addressing a crowd in which there was considerable discontent with the political situation. There were people who Zealots and wanted to violently push out their Roman invaders. Jesus was telling this crowd that people who would follow Him and be part of the kingdom of heaven, would not fight that kind of war. Rather they would be peacemakers, people who would proclaim God’s peace – that Jesus Christ came to bring peace between God and humans. This is ultimate peace in that it brings peace in this life as well as peace for eternity. But bringing this message of peace may result in conflict and persecution.

Each of us is called to be a peacemaker – to be a messenger carrying the message of peace with God through Jesus Christ. In our serving and worshiping God, proclaiming the message of peace is the most important task before us. How can we be more effective at being peacemaker – a messenger of God’s peace?

1. Be like Christ – This series is aimed at copying Christ’s character. As we become more like Jesus, we can be used by God to tell others about what Jesus has done – the Good News that Jesus brought peace between God and humankind. That is the point of practicing the spiritual disciplines – as I open my life up to God’s working by fasting, confessing, submitting, reading the Bible, serving others, meditating on the Bible, and so forth, I allow God to transform me to be used by Him to carry the news of peace.

2. Be prepared – We need to be prepared to share the news of peace. Peter wrote:

^{1Pe 3:15} But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

3. Do the discipline of evangelism – Many of us need to cross the barrier and tell others about what Jesus has done in your life. Once you have done it some, it becomes more natural. But it is a discipline. Personal sharing of the week. Here are some ideas – visiting your neighbors, taking part in an event aimed at witnessing. Remember, each one of us is different and our methods of carrying the message of peace will be different.

4. Be in community – This sermon series is on Copying Christ’s Character in Community. Putting spiritual disciplines into practice is a challenge – but I believe we will be much more successful as we do it in community. As we support each other, pray for each other, and keep each other accountable, we can help each other stick to the disciplines, including evangelism.

I believe that SVC could be much more than it is today. I believe that this room could be filled several times each weekend with hundreds of people. I dream of that happening – not for my glory or the glory of the leadership of this church, but because it would bring the Father glory. I would be very satisfied knowing that I was in the middle of what God desired

Jesus didn't tell us very many things to pray for – but one He did was to pray for workers to go into the harvest field because the harvest is great but the laborers are few. Pray for the Lord of the harvest to send for laborers.

³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

I do not understand how our working and God's working come together to bring people to believing in and following Jesus Christ. It does seem that God works through people who have free wills – they can choose to obey or not, to tell others about Jesus or not. It is too much for us humans to understand HOW it happens. But we do know some things – we do know that God calls us to be witnesses for Him, to

^{Dt 29:29} The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.