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Fourth Sunday of Advent

# The Beatitudes Part 4

Blessed Are the Peacemakers

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:9

**Sermon Series:** *Matthew*

**Topics:** Peace, Jesus, Christmas, Beatitudes, Sermon on the Mount

## Introduction

We are presently in a sermon series through the Gospel of Matthew. We are now in the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, which all the world knows as the Beatitudes.<sup>1</sup> Today is Part 4 of the Beatitudes.

Today we arrive at the seventh, in which Jesus states,

**Matthew 5:9 (ESV)** “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.”

Thus, the making of *peace* is the focus of this blessing. Those who make peace are blessed for God will call them his “*sons*,” that is, his children. It is interesting that the word for ‘son’ here (υἱός *huios*), has two meanings. First, is the most obvious, which is “an immediate male offspring—‘son.’”<sup>2</sup> This word was also,

...used as legal term in the adoption and inheritance laws of first-century Rome. As used by the apostle Paul, this term refers to the status of all Christians, both men and women, who having been adopted into God’s family, now enjoy all the privileges, obligations, and inheritance rights as God’s children.<sup>3</sup>

Second, being called “the son of \_\_\_\_\_” can also refer to “one who is a disciple or follower of someone, with the implication of being like the one whom he follows.”<sup>4</sup> Both of these

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<sup>1</sup> The word ‘beatitude’ is a transliterated English word from the Latin word, *beatus*, which means ‘blessed.’

<sup>2</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 116.

<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Preface, vi-vii.

<sup>4</sup> Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 470. For examples of this, see Mt. 12:27; 1 Ptr. 5:13.

meanings are true of those who enter into the kingdom of heaven. Christians are first adopted into the family of God, by being received as full sons and daughters and then we are called to follow Jesus, which means that we must obey him, but also to ever increasingly become like him as His Holy Spirit within us transforms us and manifests the character of Christ through us.

Thus, we could summarize this seventh beatitude as, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they have been adopted by God and shall increasingly become like God."

## Peace in Advent

The notion of **peace** very interestingly connects with the theme of this particular Sunday in Advent. Today is the fourth Sunday in Advent. The Hart family at the beginning of the service lit the third purple candle, which is called "*the Angel's candle*." This candle reminds us of the fact that God sent angels to Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus. This third purple candle represents **peace** because of the concluding notion of that magnificent message the angels announced to the shepherds that night in the fields surrounding Bethlehem. We find this account recorded in Luke 2:8-15.

## Recounting the Angelic Message

At first, only a single angel appeared to the shepherds. This one angel appeared to them in brilliant brightness that struck terror into their hearts (v.9). Thus, the first words the angel spoke to them was, "***Fear not.***" The angel then told them that he brought them "***good news of great joy for all people.***" This news was not merely good news for the Jews, but was good news "***for all people,***" including the Gentiles.

## Savior, Christ, & Lord

The good news was regarding the birth of one whom the angel referred to as **Savior, Christ,** and **Lord** (Lk. 2:11). These three titles<sup>5</sup> speak of incomprehensible greatness of this child. That he is **Savior** speaks to his role of fighting the enemies of God and his people, chief among them being sin. The angel had told Joseph that Jesus would "***save his people from their sins.***"<sup>6</sup>

That he is **Christ** speaks to his role as God's chosen messiah, the long-promised one uniquely anointed by God to do all his will.<sup>7</sup> That he is **Lord** speaks to his intimate relationship with and connection to God himself, for this word in the Greek is the word that always translates the Old Testament (OT) personal name of Yahweh.<sup>8</sup> What this angel has done is to apply to Jesus a word that in the OT is consistently applied to God himself. All that is being communicated about this newborn in the words of this angel, is almost certainly more than could be fully

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<sup>5</sup> This is the only place in the New Testament where these three titles are combined in reference to Jesus.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 1:21.

<sup>7</sup> Hebrews 10:5-7; cf. Psalm 40:6-8.

<sup>8</sup> Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 102.

comprehended in that moment (and scarcely can be comprehended by us today). Yet, these humble shepherds received this news with joyful obedience.

### A Multitude of the Heavenly Host

After giving them a sign (Lk. 2:12) by which they could identify this newborn baby boy, this single angel was then joined by a "*multitude of heavenly host*" who broke out in song. The Greek word that '*host*' translates is a word that refers to "a military army."<sup>9</sup> We could accurately say that this was 'an angelic army.' But they did not come for war, but rather for worship. They did not come to fight, but to sing. They did not come in militaristic power, but rather in majestic praise. They came singing,

**Luke 2:14 (ESV)** "Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

Their praise encompasses both high and low. Their song begins in heaven and then descends to earth. They sing of both God and then man. They proclaim glory to God and peace to man. This message of peace is what captures our attention this morning. This midnight angelic choir is the climax of this portion of the story and peace is the center of their last verse, before "*they went away into heaven*" (Lk. 2:15).

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus spoke of the blessing of peacemakers. In the skies of Bethlehem the angels spoke of God's blessing of peace. Obviously there is a connection. The connection is Jesus.

### A Question of Translation

Before we think about Jesus and his connection with peace, there is one issue that we ought to address, which is the translation of this verse. If you grew up on the King James Version, as I did, then you've most likely memorized this verse as

**Luke 2:14 (KJV)** "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

That is slightly different from the ESV, which translates the last half of this verse as "... *and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.*" If you have a copy of the ESV you will notice a footnote 4 which says, "Some manuscripts *peace, good will among men.*"<sup>10</sup> What is difficult about this translation is that it is easy to lose the subject. It is slightly ambiguous in the KJV. The subject is the source of the peace and good will. But who is the source of the peace and good will? Is it from God to man, or from man to other men? Thus, in the footnote the translators of the ESV are indicating to the reader that there are some manuscripts that

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<sup>9</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, ed. D. A. Carson, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2015), 78.

<sup>10</sup> See footnote in ESV at Luke 2:14.

have this translation, but they have not chosen to follow those manuscripts. The question is, why not?

### Older Manuscripts Discovered

The reason the translators of the ESV have not followed the KJV translation is that subsequent discoveries of older manuscripts more convincingly support the ESV translation. Since 1611, when the KJV was finished, manuscripts have been discovered that are older than those used by the KJV translators. These older manuscripts, such as, for example, those found among the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in the caves of Qumran in 1947, support the translation reflected in the ESV.

### A Dropped Sigma

The difference comes down to one letter, a sigma, which was dropped from the end of the word εὐδοχίας, which is the word 'pleasure or favor.'<sup>11</sup> The deciding principle of translation is that older manuscripts are assumed to be closer to the original than are latter ones. The older manuscripts contain the sigma at the end of *eudokias*, while the manuscripts used by the translators of the KJV do not contain the sigma (i.e. *eudokia*). Thus, virtually all recent translations (NIV, NASB, NEB, ASV, HSCB) have followed the wording of the oldest and most reliable manuscripts.

### A Technical Term for the Elect

Additionally, subsequent scholarship has demonstrated that that this phrase "ἄνθρωποις εὐδοχίας (*anthrōpois eudokias*, men of his good pleasure), is almost a technical phrase in first-century Judaism for God's elect, those on whom God has poured out his favor."<sup>12</sup> This notion strongly supports the interpretation that the favor/pleasure being spoken of here is coming *from God to man* through the birth of Jesus. The "good will" being spoken of is God's good will toward mankind, through Jesus, rather than the good will of mankind toward one another.

When I was younger and I heard this verse (in the language of the KJV), I thought it meant that the angels were saying that we ought to give glory to God and then we were to give peace and kindness (i.e. good will) to one another. I thought essentially that the coming of Jesus was simply another reason that we ought to be nice to each other, at least for a couple of months out of the year. But that is not what the angels are saying at all.

The angelic army-choir is giving glory to God, who is in the highest place, because he **through Jesus** has descended to the lowest of places, namely the earth, in order to give peace to those to whom he had chosen to be favorable and gracious. God the Father has sent as Savior, Christ (messiah), and Lord (i.e. his own authoritative personal

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<sup>11</sup> Walter L. Liefeld, "Luke," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 847.

<sup>12</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 1:1–9:50*, vol. 1, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 220.

representative) his own Son into the world to give peace to those who, apart from this great grace, would remain his enemies forever. God sent Jesus into a hostile world in order to bring peace. The angels are praising God as glorious because *HE* is the source of the peace and good will. Not us.

Thus, the peace that the angels were proclaiming, as part of the manifestation of God's glory, was not a generic peace that all men were to show toward each other (though this is true and we ought to do), but rather it was a *particular* kind of peace that God granted toward all men who embraced His Savior-Son whom He had sent into the world. ***Peace comes into the world because the peacemaker Jesus was born into the world.*** The peace that is given to "*those with whom God is pleased*" is the **peace between God and man** first before it is ever peace between man and man. This is the peace that is needed most and must precede all other kinds of peace.

## Prophesied Prince of Peace

That messiah would bring peace between God and man had long ago been foretold by the prophet Isaiah. If Jesus truly is messiah as the angel had proclaimed, then he is the one through whom God brings peace into this world. Messiah would be a peacemaker. In fact, the prophet Isaiah called him Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6 (ESV) For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

## Jesus Was Not Born for Generic Peace Between Man and Man

Jesus is the Prince of Peace, which first means ***peace between God and man***, not man and man. The primary mission of messiah was to establish peace between a holy, holy, holy God and sinful, sinful, sinful man. Jesus did not come into this wicked world to ensure that a sea of sinners could peacefully play together in the same sandbox of separation from God. Jesus did not die to grant generic global peace. If he did, then he most certainly failed, because it has never happened and apparently never will happen. Attempts have been made, but they always fail.

### The Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact

Does anyone remember the Kellogg-Briand Pact for global peace? Representatives from France and the U.S. together drafted a peace agreement that was intended to outlaw war forever. It was signed at a peace conference in Paris in August of 1928 by almost every major country in the world, including Japan, Russia, Germany, China. It lasted three years until it was broken by Japan as they invaded China.

Jesus did not come into the world to accomplish what every Ms. America contestant wants if she could have just one wish, which is "world peace." So long as sin in the human heart, war will be in the world. Jesus was very clear. He did not come to bring some kind of generic, godless peace in the world.

**Matthew 10:34-39 (ESV)** <sup>34</sup> "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. <sup>36</sup> And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. <sup>37</sup> Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. <sup>38</sup> And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup> Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

Jesus came to be loved about all else. Jesus came to be worshiped as God. Jesus came to be the most highly worshiped person on the planet. Jesus came to be loved and cherished more than you love and cherish your parents, more than your siblings, your spouse, your children, and even your own life! Loving Jesus to this degree brings division, not peace. People who don't love Jesus like this cannot tolerate being around those who do, even if they are related or married to each other.

## Jesus Was Born for Peace Between God and Man

Before we can be at peace with one another, we must first be at peace with God. This is why Jesus was born into this world. Jesus came to bring peace between God and man by atoning for our sins through his death. Jesus was born to give us new hearts.

**Ephesians 2:13-17 (ESV)** <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For **he himself is our peace**, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility <sup>15</sup> by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, <sup>16</sup> and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. <sup>17</sup> And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

Paul is explaining that Jews and Gentiles both stand in the same dreadful place; the sinful hearts within us both need to be "**abolished**." Our old, dead hearts need to be done away with. We need new hearts. We must each be made into "**a new man**." This is what Jesus accomplished on the cross, "**by the blood of Christ**." He gave himself as an atoning sacrifice for our sins so that we could be at peace with God, "**so that he might reconcile us both to God through his body on the cross**." When Jesus offered his body on the cross for the sins of those who would trust in him, he "**killed the hostility**" that had existed between sinners and a Holy

God. God hates sin.<sup>13</sup> God is hostile toward sinners every day.<sup>14</sup> The only way for this holy hostility to be removed is to be in Christ, who died to appease God's wrath against sin.

It is the blood of Jesus that covers sin. The glorious song of the angels of "peace on earth," does not come by any other means than by the blood of Jesus. "Peace on earth" refers to the need of mankind—who lives on earth—to be at peace with God who lives in the highest heaven. God is worthy of being praised as glorious because He made a way for us to be at peace with him. This was accomplished only by Jesus and such peace is given only to those who humbly surrender to Jesus and confess him as Savior, Christ, and Lord. Those who receive Jesus in this way are *"those with whom He is pleased."* There is no peace with God, who is holy, holy, holy, apart from Jesus. This is the truth that the whole world needs to know.

## Jesus the Blessed Peacemaker

Jesus is the blessed peacemaker. He has made possible peace between God and man. God called Jesus his Son. He publicly declared Jesus his Son at his baptism and he did it again when He raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him to His right hand.

Through faith in Jesus, God adopts us as His children. Through our faith in Jesus, God declares us to be His children. Through faith in Jesus we become His sons and daughters. Thus, to be sons of God is to be like Him. If we follow Him, then we must be like Him. This means that we are to be peacemakers. This means far more than that we are simply to be nice to the people around us. We are to be that, but we must be much more than that. We are to be people who help people make peace with God. Peace with God only comes through Jesus and by faith embracing what He has accomplished on the cross and in his resurrection from the dead. Sin is real and is that which separates man from God. The only solution to sin, is atonement through the blood of Jesus. Therefore, we must point the unbelievers around us to Jesus, so that they too can God to God through Jesus.

We too must point ourselves to Jesus. We too must continually go to God through Him. We must, with the angels, glorify God for being so gracious and merciful to us by sending Jesus to do what we could not do. We must glorify God for his great grace and mercy and love and adoption and forgiveness and kindness to us through Jesus.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.

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<sup>13</sup> Psalm 11:5; Proverbs 6:16.

<sup>14</sup> Psalm 5:5; 7:11; 11:5.