**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**MATTHEW-020. THE SEVENTH BEATITUDE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."*

*Matthew 5:9*

This is the last Beatitude descriptive of the character of the Christian. There follows one more, which describes his reception by the world. But this one sets the top stone, the shining apex, upon the whole temple-structure which the previous Beatitudes had been gradually building up. You may remember that I have pointed out in previous sermons how all these various traits of the Christian life are deduced from the root of poverty of spirit. You may also remember how I have had occasion to show that if we consider that first Beatitude, Blessed are the poor in spirit, as the root and mother of all the rest, the remainder are so arranged as that we have alternately a grace which regards mainly the man himself and his relations to God, and one which also includes his relations to man.

Now there are three of these which look out into the world, and these three are consummated by this one of my text. These are the meek, which describes a man's attitude to opposition and hatred; the merciful, which describes his indulgence in judgment and his pitifulness in action; and the peacemakers. For Christian people are not merely to bear injuries and to recompense them with pity and with love, but they are actively to try to bring about a wholesomer and purer state of humanity, and to breathe the peace of God, which passes understanding, over all the janglings and struggles of this world.

So, I think, if we give a due depth of significance to that name peacemaker, we shall find that this grace worthily completes the whole linked series, and is the very jewel which clasps the whole chain of Christian and Christ-like characteristics.

**I. How are Christ's peacemakers made?**

Now there are certain people whose natural disposition has in it a fine element, which diffuses soothing and concord all around them. I dare say we all have known such--perhaps some good woman, without any very shining gifts of intellect, who yet dwelt in such peace of heart herself that conflict and jangling were rebuked in her presence. And there are other people who love peace, and seek after it in the cowardly fashion of letting things alone; whose peacemaking has no nobler source than hatred of trouble, and a wish to let sleeping dogs lie. These, instead of being peacemakers, are war-makers, for they are laying up materials for a tremendous explosion some day.

But it is a very different temper that Jesus Christ has in view here, and I need only ask you to do again what we have had occasion to do in the previous sermons of this series--to link this characteristic with those that go before it, of which it is regarded as being the bright and consummate flower and final outcome. No man can bring to others that which he does not possess. Vainly will he whose own heart is torn by contending passions, whose own life is full of animosities and unreconciled outstanding causes of alienation and divergence between him and God, between him and duty, between him and himself, ever seek to shed any deep or real peace amongst men. He may superficially solder some external quarrels, but that is not all that Jesus Christ means. His peacemakers are created by having passed through all the previous experiences which the preceding verses bring out. They have learned the poverty of their own spirits. They have wept tears, if not real and literal, yet those which are far more agonising--tears of spirit and conscience--when they have thought of their own demerits and foulnesses. They have bowed in humble submission to the will of God, and even to that will as expressed by the antagonisms of man. They have yearned after the possession of a fuller and nobler righteousness than they have attained. They have learned to judge others with a gentle judgment because they know how much they themselves need it, and to extend to others a helping hand because they are aware of their own impotence and need of succour. They have been led through all these, often painful, experiences into a purity of heart which has been blessed by some measure of vision of God; and, having thus been equipped and prepared, they are fit to go out into the world and say, in the presence of all its tempests, Peace! be still. Something of the miracle-working energy of the Master whom they serve will be shed upon those who serve Him.

Brethren, the peacemaker who is worthy of the name must have gone through these deep spiritual experiences. I do not say that they are to come in regular stages, separable from each other. That is not the way in which a character mounts towards God. It does so not by a flight of steps, at distinctly different elevations, but rather by an ascending slope. And, although these various Christian graces which precede that of my text are separable in thought, and are linked in the fashion that our Lord sets forth in experience, they may be, and often are, contemporaneous.

But whether separated from one another in time or not, whether this life-preparation, of which the previous verses give us the outline, has been realised drop by drop, or whether it has been all flooded on to the soul at once, as it quite possibly has, in some fashion or other it must precede our being the sort of peacemakers that Christ desires and blesses.

There is only one more point that I would make here before I go on, and that is, that it is well to notice that the climax of Christian character, according to Jesus Christ Himself, is found in our relations to men, and not in our relation to God. Worship of heart and spirit, devout emotions of the sacredest, sweetest, most hallowed and hallowing sort, are absolutely indispensable, as I have tried to show you. But equally, if not more, important is it for us to remember that the purest communion with God, and the selectest emotional experiences of the Christian life, are meant to be the bases of active service; and that, if such service does not follow these, there is good reason for supposing that these are spurious, and worth very little. The service of man is the outcome of the love of God. He who begins with poverty of spirit is perfected when, forgetting himself, and coming down from the mountain-top, where the Shekinah cloud of the Glory and the audible voice are, he plunges into the struggles of the multitude below, and frees the devil-ridden boy from the demon that possesses him. Begin by all means with poverty of spirit, or you will never get to this--Blessed are the peacemakers. But see to it that poverty of spirit leads to the meekness, the mercifulness, the peace-bringing influence which Christ has pronounced blessed.

**II. What is the peace which Christ's peacemakers bring?**

This is a very favourite text with people that know very little of the depths of Christianity. They fancy that it appeals to common sense and men's natural consciences, apart altogether from minutenesses of doctrine or of Christian experience. They are very much mistaken. No doubt there is a surface of truth, but only a surface, in the application that is generally given to these words of our text, as if it meant nothing more than he is a good man that goes about and tries to make contending people give up their quarrels, and produces a healing atmosphere of tranquillity wherever he goes. That is perfectly true, but there is a great deal more in the text than that. If we consider the Scriptural usage of this great word peace, and all the ground that it covers in human experience; if we remember that it enters as an element into Christ's own name, the Peace-Bringer, the Prince of Peace; and if we notice, as I have already done, the place which this Beatitude occupies in the series, we shall be obliged to look for some far deeper meaning before we can understand the sweep of our Lord's intention here.

I do not think that I am going one inch too far, or forcing meanings into His words which they are not intended to bear, when I say that the first characteristic of the peace, which His disciples have been passed through their apprenticeship in order to fit them to bring, is the peace of reconciliation with God. The cause of all the other fightings in the world is that men's relation to the Father in heaven is disturbed, and that, whilst there flow out from Him only amity and love, these are met by us with antagonism often, with opposition of will often, with alienation of heart often, and with indifference and forgetfulness almost uniformly. So the first thing to be done to make men at peace with one another and with themselves is to rectify their relation to God, and bring peace there.

We often hear in these days complaints of Christian Churches and Christian people because they do not fling themselves, with sufficient energy to please the censors, into movements which are intended to bring about happier relations in society. The longest way round is sometimes the shortest way home. It does not belong to all of us Christians, and I doubt whether it belongs to the Christian Church as such at all, to fling itself into the movements to which I have referred. But if a man go and carry to men the great message of a reconciled and a reconciling God manifest in Jesus Christ, and bringing peace between men and God, he will have done more to sweeten society and put an end to hostility than I think he will be likely to do by any other method. Christian men and women, whatever else you and I are here for, we are here mainly that we may preach, by lip and life, the great message that in Christ is our peace, and that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.

We are not to leave out, of course, that which is so often taken as being the sole meaning of the great word of my text. There is much that we are all bound to do to carry the tranquillising and soothing influences of Gospel principles and of Christ's example into the littlenesses of daily life. Any fool can stick a lucifer match into a haystack and make a blaze. It is easy to promote strife. There is a malicious love of it in us all; and ill-natured gossip has a great deal to do in bringing it about. But it takes something more to put the fire out than it did to light it, and there is no nobler office for Christians than to seek to damp down all these devil's flames of envy and jealousy and mutual animosity. We have to do it, first, by making very sure that we do not answer scorn with scorn, gibes with gibes, hate with hate, but seek to overcome evil with good. It takes two to make a quarrel, and your most hostile antagonist cannot break the peace unless you help him. If you are resolved to keep it, kept it will be.

May I say another word? I think that our text, though it goes a good deal deeper, does also very plainly tell us Christian folk what is our duty in relation to literal warfare. There is no need for me to discuss here the question as to whether actual fighting with armies and swords is ever legitimate or not. It is a curious kind of Christian duty certainly, if it ever gets to be one. And when one thinks of the militarism that is crushing Europe and driving her ignorant classes to wild schemes of revolution; and when one thinks of the hell of battlefields, of the miseries of the wounded, of mourning widows, of ruined peaceful peasants, of the devil's passions that war sets loose, some of us find it extremely hard to believe that all that is ever in accordance with the mind of Christ. But whether you agree with me in that or no, surely my text points to the duty of the Christian Church to take up a very much more decisive position in reference to the military spirit than, alas! it ever has done. Certainly it does seem to be not very obviously in accordance with Christ's teachings that men-of-war should be launched with a religious service, or that Te Deums should be sung because thousands have been killed. It certainly does seem to be something like a satire on European Christianity that one of the chief lessons we have taught the East is that we have instructed the Japanese how to use Western weapons to fight their enemies. Surely, surely, if Christian churches laid to heart as they ought these plain words of the Master, they would bring their united influence to bear against that demon of war, and that pinchbeck, spurious glory which is connected with it. Blessed are the peacemakers': let us try to earn the benediction.

**III. Lastly, note the issue of this peacemaking.**

They shall be called the sons of God. Called? By whom? Christ does not say, but it should not be difficult to ascertain. It seems to me that to suppose that it is by men degrades this promise, instead of making it the climax of the whole series. Besides, it is not true that if a Christian man lives as I have been trying to describe, protesting against certain evils, trying to diffuse an atmosphere of peace round about him; and, above all, seeking to make known the Name of the great Peacemaker, men will generally call him a son of God. The next verse but one tells us what they will call him. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake. They are a great deal more likely to have stones and rotten eggs flung at them than to be pelted with bouquets of scented roses of popular approval. No! no! it is not man's judgment that is meant here. It matters very little what men call us. It matters everything what God calls us. It is He who will call them sons of God. So the Apostle John thought that Christ meant, for he very beautifully and touchingly quotes this passage when he says, Beloved! behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.

God's calling is a recognition of men for what they are. God owns the man that lives in the fashion that we have been trying to outline--God owns him for His child; manifestly a son, because he has the Father's likeness. Be ye therefore imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love. God in Christ is the first Peacemaker, and they who go about the world proclaiming His peace and making peace, bear the image of the heavenly, and are owned by God as His sons.

What does that owning mean? Well, it means a great deal which has yet to be disclosed, but it means this, too, that the whisper of the Voice which owns us for children will be heard by ourselves. The Spirit which cries, Abba, Father! will open our ears to hear Him say, Thou art My beloved Son. Or, to put it into plain English, there is no surer way by which we can come to the calm, happy, continual consciousness of being the children of God than by this living like Him, to spread the peace of God over all hearts.

I have said in former sermons that all these promises, which are but the natural outcome of the characteristics to which they are attached, have a double reference, being fulfilled in germ here, and in maturity hereafter. Like the rest, this one has that double reference. For the consciousness, here and now, that we are the children of God is but, as it were, the morning twilight of what shall hereafter be an typesetting meridian sunshine. What depths of divine assimilation, what mysteries of calm, peaceful, filial fellowship, what riches beyond count of divine inheritance, lie in the name of son, the possession of these alone can tell. For the same Apostle, whose comment upon these words we have already quoted, goes on to say, It doth not yet appear what we shall be.

Only we have one assurance, wide enough for all anticipation, and firm enough for solid hope: If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. He must make us sons before we can be called sons of God. He must give us peace with God, with ourselves, with men, with circumstances, before we can go forth effectually to bring peace to others. If He has given us these good things, He has bound us to spread them. Let us do so. And if our peace ever is spoken in vain as regards others, it will come back to us again; and we shall be kept in perfect peace, even in the midst of strife, until we enter at last into the city of peace and serve the King of Peace for ever.