

- g. Jesus' proclamation concerning the pure in heart indicated that the promised kingdom was now at hand. The purity that had existed only symbolically in the preparatory kingdom was now to be realized in truth; the time of fulfillment had arrived. This indication of the in-breaking of the kingdom is reinforced with the next Beatitude: "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*" (5:8). For just as purity was a core component of the Israelite kingdom and its prophesied antitypal counterpart, so was the concept of *peace*.

The Israelite kingdom was grounded in the Father-son relationship between Yahweh and Abraham's descendents. The covenant at Sinai formally established and defined that relationship, which resulted in happy intimacy between the Father-King and His royal children. Israel's commitment to love God with heart, soul, and mind and bind themselves to His faithful service as devoted sons appeared to resolve the long-standing problem of divine-human estrangement; the Israelite kingdom was to be a kingdom of *peace*, and Israel celebrated its new-found intimacy with peace offerings and a fellowship meal (Exodus 24:1-11).

But the kingdom's peace was short-lived; before Moses descended from Sinai the sons of Israel had already broken the covenant and reintroduced enmity between themselves and Yahweh. From that point forward the promise of final, everlasting peace between heaven and earth – the promise grounded in God's oath in Eden – became a centerpiece of the developing doctrine of the messianic kingdom. When the Son of David came, the sons of the kingdom would at last enjoy peace on every side, free of danger, insecurity and fear (cf. Hosea 2:1-3:5; Micah 4:1-8; Zephaniah 3:1-20; Zechariah 3:1-10; cf. also Isaiah 32:9-20, 60:1-22 with 9:1-7).

The prophets tended to emphasize peace from earthly enemies and difficulties, and yet they left no doubt that the primary issue in God's pledge of future peace was the reconciliation and restoration of the created order to Himself. As with the Israelite kingdom itself, the promise of peace from natural enemies anticipated an ultimate fulfillment in a spiritual counterpart; Yahweh's messianic kingdom would bring, not the peace of national security, but the peace of spiritual liberation and the renewal of divine-human intimacy. The kingdom would usher in peace precisely because it would see the Lord accomplish His *salvation* (Isaiah 52:1-7, 53:1-54:10; also Ezekiel 34:23-31, 37:1-28; Zechariah 9:9-12).

The multitudes listening to Jesus marveled at Him and wondered if He might indeed be the Christ. Furthermore, they knew that Messiah's kingdom would usher in the Lord's peace, but they had been taught to think of that peace in terms of liberation from Gentile occupation and oppression. Yahweh would institute His peace by delivering Israel from all its enemies and restoring its national sovereignty and security. But by associating the theme of kingdom peace with the notion of its subjects being "peacemakers," Jesus was again pointing His hearers to the spiritual, re-creational nature of His kingdom. The peace that characterizes it isn't national, social, political or military; it is the true peace of resolved estrangement and restored intimacy between the Creator and His creation.

Though the Jews had a faulty conception of the promised kingdom and the peace associated with it, they acknowledged that God is preeminently the kingdom's *peacemaker* (the "doer of peace"). Their prophets were unanimous in affirming that the messianic kingdom would be characterized by peace, and they attributed that peace to Yahweh's presence and power. God was Israel's peacemaker, and so it made perfect sense for Jesus to declare that men who labor in the cause of peace show themselves to be sons of God. A son is like his father (cf. 5:43-45).

This is an important association that is often misunderstood. Once again, people tend to view the concept of "likeness" with respect to sonship in natural terms. Scripturally, sonship implies some sort of *essential* sameness, but too often this is understood ethically and morally rather than ontologically. That is to say, the peacemaker is a "son of God" in the sense that he upholds the same ethic and practice as God. But Jesus was saying more than this: *Such individuals aren't sons of God simply because they do what He does; they are sons who share the nature and character of their heavenly Father.* The sons of the kingdom participate in the kingdom's defining principle of renewal and restoration; they are restored image-sons who are sons of God through union with the divine Son.

This truth, taken in context, has at least three important implications:

- 1) First, it highlights again that the kingdom of heaven is the realm of the new creation. The reason the sons of the kingdom are "doers of peace" is that they themselves are recipients of God's peace in His Son. Having been enlivened, renewed and reconciled in Him, they now bear in themselves His nature and disposition.
- 2) But secondly, it certifies the present existence of this kingdom of renewal; for how can men be ministers of peace unless they are first sharers in it? *Those who continue in their alienation and hostility to God and men cannot even conceive of true peace let alone serve its cause* (ref. Romans 8:5-8; Colossians 1:21-22; Titus 3:3; James 4:4; etc.).
- 3) That men are peacemakers testifies to the presence of Jesus' kingdom, *but it also highlights the kingdom's mandate and mission in the present age.* Because the Jews thought of the kingdom's peace in nationalistic terms, Jesus' words most likely caught them off guard. But they shouldn't have, for the notion of the kingdom's subjects being peacemakers was a key component of the Scripture's doctrine of the kingdom. That doctrine had its first formal articulation in connection with the Abrahamic Covenant. God pledged to Abraham a kingdom land in which his descendents would dwell with Him as His royal children. But as sons of the King, Abraham's offspring were called to administer Yahweh's rule in the earth, the goal of which was the mediation of His blessing to all of mankind. The heart of the Abrahamic Covenant – its *gospel* – was the ministry of reconciliation (Galatians 3:8); the sons of the kingdom were called to be peacemakers.

Now with the coming of the Prince of Peace, the time was at hand for that kingdom mandate to begin to be carried out. Israel had failed to fulfill it for the simple reason that its own estrangement from God had never really been addressed. *How could the sons of the covenant bring the knowledge of Yahweh to the other families of the earth when they didn't know Him themselves?* So far from fulfilling its unique Abrahamic privilege of bringing God's blessing to the world of men, Israel actually did the exact opposite: It testified against God and despised the nations by joining with them in their unbelief and rebellion.

But where national Israel had failed, the True Israel would succeed: Jesus came into the world as Abraham's True Seed; in Him all the families of the earth would indeed be blessed just as His Father had sworn (cf. again Genesis 12:3, 22:16-18, 26:1-4, 28:10-14 with Galatians 3:6-16). For the promise of worldwide blessing is the promise of divine-human reconciliation; it is the promise of peace. Yahweh is the great Peacemaker, but His work of peace is in His Son, the Prince of Peace. ***The Father is the world's peacemaker precisely because Jesus is the effectual "doer of peace"*** (cf. Isaiah 9:1-7 with Haggai 2:1-9 and Malachi 3:1; cf. also Luke 1:76-79, 2:8-14, 19:29-42; John 14:27, 16:33; Ephesians 2:11-18).

Thus Jesus' proclamation in this beatitude has a profound salvation-historical significance – one that is often missed by those who read this passage. Like the other beatific qualities, "peacemaker" is commonly understood in natural terms, being reduced to the notion of a conciliator – a person who refrains from conflict and contention and seeks instead to resolve them (i.e., a "peaceable" man). *Ironically, if this were Jesus' meaning, He couldn't claim this title for Himself, for He was anything but this sort of "peacemaker."* Everything about Him agitated and irritated people; more than that, He had come to initiate a new and deadly conflict, one that would even tear the closest families apart (Matthew 10:34-36).

Jesus was a peacemaker in a way that confounded the world of His day, and that has never ceased to be the case. Today the spiritual "peacemaker" is the religious pluralist who affirms the value and goodness of all religious traditions and practices. Recognizing that religion tends to divide and destroy, he calls, not for secularism, but for the religious magnanimity of enlightened "spirituality." In the conviction of this sort of peacemaker, the truly godly person understands that all religions possess truth and so celebrates rather than denigrates religious diversity. He doesn't deny Jesus and His Way – he rejoices in it, but he equally insists that others and their "ways" are just as capable of securing spiritual well-being.

But the true peacemaker bears the life and likeness of the Prince of Peace and therefore "works peace" in conformity to Him and His peace. He knows that peace doesn't reside in toleration or deference, but in the singular *gospel of peace* by which men are reconciled to God and, therefore, to themselves and one another. The One whose presence heralded the good news of unqualified, everlasting peace has commissioned those who know His peace to be the ambassadors of it (cf. Isaiah 52:7; Romans 10:6-15). Blessed are the peacemakers.