

## **These Forty Days**

**Matthew 5:9-12**

**1. Peace – breakers.**

- Proverbs 16:28, 22:11, 22:10; James 3:10

**2. Peace – fakers.**

- Ephesians 4:25

**3. Peace – makers.**

- Ephesians 4:3-6; Colossians 1:20; Romans 8:14; Luke 10:1-20;  
James 3:17-18; Isaiah 9:6; John 14:47; Proverbs 15:1; Ephesians  
4:31-32; Romans 12:18; 2 Corinthians 5:17-18; Matthew 8:26, 5:9;  
Isaiah 51:7; John 15:21; Matthew 5:3, 19, 25:34; James 1:2

**4. In Persecution: remember God will protect you.**

- Isaiah 43:2; Revelation 6

**5. Persecution: know what you want to die for.**

**6. Persecution: don't give up!**

- Romans 8:33-34

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## **These Forty Days, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent**

### ***Matthew 5:9-12***

Welcome to the second Sunday of Lent. If you've been reading in our Lenten Daily Devotional, These Forty Days, then you know that there are 40 days in Lent. These forty days are meant to help us identify with the forty days of fasting that Jesus had in the desert where he was tempted by the devil and overcame him, before he began his public ministry. So Lent is a time for us to humble ourselves and reflect on what Christ has done for us. Many people fast for these forty days, fasting from things like food, from sweets, from coffee, from TV, from social media, or other kinds of things. Then, in addition to these forty days *of* Lent, there are six Sundays *in* Lent. Sundays are *in* the season of Lent, but they aren't part *of* fasting at Lent. *Every* Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection of Christ; therefore we don't fast on Sundays; we feast! So if you are giving up chocolate for Lent, then when you leave here, go to the store and buy a Hershey's bar. Or buy a whole case of Hershey bars; you can eat them all day long! The total Lenten season is 46 days: forty days of fasting and six Sundays of celebration.

Got it?

Great! Our daily Lenten devotional is helping us think through all of these days, and our journey through this season of Lent together involves the Sermon on the Mount. Last week, I gave a great deal of background material on the Sermon on the Mount, so if you were not with us, please either watch it on our YouTube channel or the WVC Facebook page, or go to our website and listen to it or download the manuscript.

We spent time last Sunday going through the first six "beatitudes" that Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount with, and today we'll look at the last two. Remember that these are not isolated characteristics that some Christians are good at, while others are good at a different one. *All* of these are attitudes and character traits that every Christian is to have.

I also remind you that there is a progressive order to these beatitudes, which means that as we live them out, they will ultimately lead to the last two; that we will become peacemakers and there is a good chance we will be persecuted.

As Dr. Jeren Rowell, the author of our devotional book says about these last two beatitudes in the reading for today, "Peacemaking and persecution are neighbors." That's because when we are truly living the way of peacemakers, there will be those who will be threatened by it and will persecute us for it. Let's see what that means; would you stand with me as I read the passage for today, and then we will unpack it:

Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.  
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.  
(Matthew 5:9-12, niv)

Thank you for honoring God’s Word by standing; you can have a seat now.

Did you know there are three types of people in this world when it comes to peace? There are: *peace-breakers*, there are *peace-fakers* and there are *peace-makers*.<sup>1</sup>

Let’s look first at...

## 1. Peace-*breakers*.

Peace-breakers are people who go out of their way to cause trouble and division. They are just plain trouble makers. They are deliberately confrontational. They walk around with a chip on their shoulder looking to pick a fight. They will fight about anything and everything – even things that don’t really matter. They disagree – just to disagree. Look at what Proverbs says about these troublemakers:

“Troublemakers start fights; gossips break up friendships.” (Proverbs 16:28 tmt)

God doesn’t take too kindly to troublemakers. It reminds me of the story of a young pastor who found a serious problem in his new congregation. During the Sunday service, half the congregation stood for the prayers and half remained seated, and each side shouted at the other, insisting that theirs was the true tradition. Nothing the pastor said or did helped solve the impasse. Finally, in desperation, the young pastor tracked down the church’s 99-year-old founding pastor.

He met the old pastor in the nursing home and poured out his troubles. “So tell me,” he pleaded, “was it the tradition for the congregation to stand during the prayers?”

“No,” answered the old pastor.

“Ah,” responded the younger man, “then it was the tradition to sit during the prayers.”

“No,” answered the old pastor.

“Well,” the young pastor responded, “what we have is complete chaos! Half the people stand and shout and the other half sit and scream.”

“Ah,” said the old pastor, “*that* was the tradition.”<sup>2</sup>

God desires peacemakers – not peace-breakers. Look at the kind of people God says He loves:

“God loves the pure-hearted and well-spoken; good leaders also delight in their friendship.” (Proverbs 22:11 tmt)

Make special note of the word “friendship.” A friend is someone who learns to get along with people. In the church we should be friends because we are family. We may have

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<sup>1</sup> From a message by Rev. Tom Shephard, *Peacemaking – The Seventh Step To Happiness*

<sup>2</sup> As retold by P. J. Alindogan, *The Potter’s Jar blog*, “Communicate and Relate” (9-4-11)

biological family members who are not friendly, but for the church, God is our Father. Christ is our Savior. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. We need peacemakers in the church and in the world. We need people in the church who strive for unity. Look at how God tells us to deal with troublemakers:

“Kick out the troublemakers and things will quiet down; you need a break from bickering and griping!” (Proverbs 22:10 tmt)

Now, before we take this verse and go on a “witch hunt” to get rid of any troublemakers – don’t forget that all of us can have bad days. We need to be merciful, too – remember? That means we forgive each other and help each other move toward peace and unity. Before we look at anyone else, let’s examine our own hearts and see if we are peacemakers and make sure we aren’t peace-breakers.

Folks let me say this: the sure way to be a *peace-breaker* is with the use of your tongue! Gossip, slander, being a busy-body, being judgmental – these things don’t belong in the church. We need to kick those things out! We are here to build each other up – not to tear each other down. We are here to create unity not division. We need to be peacemakers not peace-breakers.

So before we start looking at others we need to listen to what we are saying ourselves. We need to hear the words that come out of our own mouths. We need to ask, “Are my words building up – or are they tearing down?” All of us are capable of doing both. We can either build up – or we can tear down. We can either bless or we can curse. Look at what James says:

Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. (James 3:10 niv)

We must be peacemakers with our actions and also with our words.

The second group that we are going to look at is...

## **2. Peace-fakers.**

What do I mean by ‘peace-fakers’? Peace-fakers will go to any lengths to avoid any kind of conflict, confrontation or argument, so they’ll settle for a counterfeit peace that is based on avoiding the real issues. They avoid talking about things because it might upset the other person. So they give up – give in – even when the issue is vital.

Have you ever seen a bench-clearing brawl in a baseball game? They are kind of a tradition in baseball. When tempers flare and a fight breaks out during a baseball game, it is a tradition that players and coaches rally to support their teammates; everyone runs out onto the field and starts hitting someone from the other team. So what do you do if you are a Christian ballplayer?

I remember reading about one Christian who played for the Seattle Mariners some years ago, and I’m sorry but I can’t remember who it was. But he explained how he dealt with bench-clearing brawls. When he could tell that a fight was about to break out, he would look at the opponents’ bench for a friend, maybe a former teammate. With the eruption of a

fight, he would bolt from the dugout and race toward his selected friend, quickly grabbing him by the jersey and saying, "If you don't hurt me, I won't hurt you." The two would then grapple to the ground, and do their best job of *acting* like they were fighting. In the end, they appeared manly, supported their team members, and avoided hurting anyone.

Something tells me that's *not* what Jesus had in mind when he said, "Blessed are the peacemakers."<sup>3</sup> That's more of a "peace-faker."

Some people will try to ride both sides of the fence just to avoid conflict. They will agree with everyone – no matter what the issue is. They will tell people that they agree with *them* and then turn around and tell that other guy they agree with *them* too – even though the issues are in direct opposition to one another. They are faking peace – because peace is not appeasement.

You see – peace at any price is not peace. When you know you need to tell the truth, your enemy the devil will whisper in your ear, "Don't do it! Maintain the status quo. Don't upset the apple cart." Folks, be very careful what you say – or don't say – to keep the peace. Look at what Paul says in Ephesians:

"Tell your neighbor the truth. In Christ's body we're all connected to each other, after all. When you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself." (Ephesians 4:25 tmt)

Folks don't fake peace at the expense of truth – but seek peace for one another. Now let's look at...

### **3. Peace-*makers*.**

There is a verse we refer to a lot in every membership class, and you hear us reiterate it every time we receive new members. It is from the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus that he wrote:

"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." (Ephesians 4:3-6, niv)

That's a big part of what being a peacemaker means. Because when you seek peace, when you work to reconcile people to one another, you are doing *exactly* what God does. That's why He sent his Son – to reconcile us to himself...

"and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross."  
(Colossians 1:20, nrsv)

To live the beatitudes is to act like Jesus does. Reconciliation – making peace – is what the Kingdom of Heaven is all about (Romans 8:14; Luke 10:1-20). The Bible says:

"But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-

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<sup>3</sup> James Schmotzer, Bellingham, Washington

loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.” (James 3:17-18, niv).

Peacemakers are righteous – like Jesus – when we are making peace and reconciling ourselves to each other or helping others do so.

An impure heart, or a divided heart, is not at peace. Jesus is called the “Prince of Peace,” (Isaiah 9:6) and he came to give us peace: Jesus said:

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you...” (John 14:47, niv)

Peacemakers are very different kind of people. Let me quickly give you some reasons why they are different:

***- Peacemakers pay attention to what they say.***

Like we already said, peacemakers are prepared to tell the truth and to trust God for the outcome. They want peace without compromise. They want peace that is lasting and worthwhile – but when they speak the truth to each other, they do it gently. Look at what Proverbs chapter fifteen says:

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.” (Proverbs 15:1 niv)

***- Peacemakers attack the problem, not the person.***

You can’t focus on fixing the problem if you’re focused on blaming others at the same time. It’s impossible. If you think you’re a peacemaker, but all you do is blame the other person for the problem – then you’re not a peacemaker; you’re still trying to pick a fight. If you’re still trying to establish blame; you’re still bitter. Focus on the problem not the person. Look at what it says in Ephesians chapter four:

“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:31-32 niv)

***- Peacemakers cooperate as much as possible.***

Look at what Romans chapter twelve says:

“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” (Romans 12:18 niv)

We work together in the body of Christ; we all do our part. We take responsibility for our own actions, but we have a responsibility to love each other.

There are some people that are hard to get along with, but do everything you can to get along with them. Still, here is another fact:

***- Peace always has a price.***

If you want peace in your home, your marriage, your church – there is always a price. It costs you your self-centeredness. It costs you your selfishness. It costs you your self-inflated ego. You may need to say, “Maybe my wife was right.” “Maybe my husband has a

point.” “Maybe my co-worker has a legitimate gripe.” “Maybe I need to apologize to that person in church.” You see, peace has a price; you will likely have to lose something in yourself. It’s letting go of self to let God take control. In relationships, sooner or later we hurt each other; accidentally or intentionally. We need to say to one another, “I’m sorry.” It’s not easy to do. *I* know it’s not easy. I’m not perfect – but thank goodness – I’m forgiven, and if you know Christ – you’re forgiven too. So we ought to forgive one another – just as Christ has forgiven us.

God wants peacemakers in our homes, in our workplace, in our church, in our community. We need to be bridge builders not bridge breakers. “If possible, as much as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

**- *Peacemakers emphasize relationships above resolution.***

Folks here is a simple fact – people are different than you. They don’t always see things the same way that you do. We don’t always agree – but we can agreeably disagree. There are things we will never see eye to eye on – but we can still always walk shoulder to shoulder and hand in hand.

The Bible says:

“Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons! Look at it! All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other.” (2 Corinthians 5:17-18 tmt)

God is in the peacemaking business. God has called us to be in the peacemaking business too. God says that relationships are important. That is what life is about. When all is said and done – you won’t have possessions – but you’ll still have relationships. Heaven is about relationships. You get into heaven by the relationship you have with Jesus. Others get into heaven when you introduce them to Jesus. We won’t have “stuff” in heaven but we will have each other and Jesus too. Relationships matter. *Relationships need to be emphasized above resolution.*

How can you be a peacemaker? It all begins by knowing the “Prince of Peace” – Jesus Christ. It all begins by have a relationship with Him. He wants you to trust Him – to believe in Him – to have faith in Him. He has the ability to change things. He has the ability to fix that which is broken. He can even calm the storms at sea. Right after Jesus finished preaching the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew eight, Jesus and the disciples took a boat across the lake, and there is a story of a storm. The storm was incredibly strong and powerful and life threatening. The storm was so fierce that the disciples thought they were going to die. Their little boat was being tossed around like a cork. Waves were coming over the sides. But do you remember what Jesus did? Matthew tells us:

“he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.”  
(Matthew 8:26 niv)

You see Jesus was a peacemaker. He changes things. Where there is a storm – He creates calm. Where there is chaos – He creates order. Where there is bitterness and strife – He creates peace. He is the Prince of Peace, and he calls us to be peacemakers too. Friends, I don’t have to convince you that this world, this country, and even our community, is filled

with division, discord, hatred, and fighting. Where will the world learn of the Prince of Peace if they don't see His followers striving to bring peace into this world, if they don't see us at peace within our churches?

"Blessed are the peacemakers, For they will be called children of God." Matthew 5:9 (niv)

*This is part of our calling in this world, my friends!*

*Pray*

But the problem is that the world doesn't always want peace. For example, did you notice in our recent election, that when the president was a Republican, there were some Democrats who were poisonous with their hatred and vitriol and evil verbal attacks on the president? Then, as soon as there was a Democrat in the White House, those same Democrats were pleading for peace in our country. Everyone wants peace when their side is in power. The Republicans did it, too. (Don't get me started on the violence and destruction and chaos in the capital building) But peacemakers are a disruption to people in power. Peacemakers disturb people's personal agendas. So, as a result, peacemakers often end up being persecuted. That's what happened with Jesus and the Pharisees. And that is why Jesus saved this beatitude for last in his list – because *every* Christian is to be a peace-maker, and peacemaking in the world often results in persecution.

Unlike the other beatitudes, which have only one verse for each of them, this final beatitude has *three* verses – because it is so important.

Living in a healthy relationship with God and others is Jesus' definition of righteousness. In the process of the previous beatitudes, we continue to move toward righteousness, and we have also begun making a difference as peacemakers, helping people make peace with God and one another. You could say that we are now at the center of God's will, because we are doing exactly what God wants, or wills, for us to do. Some people say that the safest place is being at the center of God's will, yet in fact it could be the most dangerous place.

More often than not, the peacemakers get persecuted because there are many people in the world that don't want to have peace; they want to hold onto their perceived power. The result is persecution.

The first readers of Matthew's Gospel were facing intense persecutions, risking their lives to be known as disciples of Jesus, and often giving their lives for it.

All the forms of persecution that Jesus lists here, he himself went through. These aren't anything new. If you live the Christian life in this world, you will be misunderstood, picked on, left out, and in some countries you will be ostracized and killed for it (including this one someday). You should expect it and be ready for it.

But that's not to say you should be a self-made martyr, being obnoxious about your faith and assuming when people reject you for *that* you are being persecuted. When you are a jerk and people call you a jerk, don't pretend you are being persecuted! You are simply being identified! The key here is when Jesus says, "because of *me*." We are talking about *Jesus'* way of living (Isaiah 51:7; John 15:21; Matthew 5:3, 19, 25:34; James 1:2), which is the way of love for others.



And keep in mind when you live the Jesus way, you are rescuing souls from the devil's hands and he doesn't like it, so he will incite persecution against you for being a peacemaker. So congratulations! You are doing what God asks and you are being treated like Jesus; the kingdom of heaven is promised for you.

<sup>4</sup>There are many saints in history that have gone through this path. Learning from them, we have at least three important reminders that we need when we go through a tough time.

#### **4. In Persecution: remember God will protect you.**

There is a possibility that some of us in this room will be cited, arrested, or even killed for believing in Christ – someday. Did you know that just since we started this service, eight Christians were killed in this world? And at any given time, one in nine Christians experience high levels of persecution.<sup>5</sup>

So if that's true, then how can I say that God will protect us? Well, over 750 years *before* Jesus gave us the sermon on the mount, God said through Isaiah:

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.” (Isaiah 43:2, niv)

So what does that mean – after all, there are martyrs killed every hour. That verse means that *even if we are killed in this life*, we will live forever with God in Christ, and the Book of Revelation describes a special place in God's throne room for the martyrs (Revelation 6). Yes, God will protect you – *even in death*. So, when it comes to persecution...

#### **5. Persecution: know what you want to die for.**

We're all going to die; the death rate as of this morning is still at right around 100%. The key is, how do you want to die? Do you want to die living for Christ or not? It's knowing what we want to die for that allows us to face persecutions with courage. Jesus spent three verses on this important final beatitude because ultimately every peacemaker will go through this to some degree. The Prince of Peace was crucified. In one way or another, we will be persecuted. But in...

#### **6. Persecution: don't give up!**

Winston Churchill went to Harrow school in England where he nearly flunked out three times – he flunked out twice, but finally passed on his third time. After Churchill had become Prime Minister of England, Harrow school invited him to give their commencement

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<sup>4</sup> From a message by Rev. Samuel Stone, *Blessed are Those Who are Persecuted for Righteousness' Sake*  
Summary: *Eight of the Eight Milestones on the Journey of the Fruitful Followers*.

<sup>5</sup> [https://forthemartyrs.com/10-facts-about-christian-persecution/?utm\\_term=christians%20being%20killed&utm\\_campaign=Christian+Persecution&utm\\_source=adwords&utm\\_medium=ppc&hsa\\_acc=9723476535&hsa\\_cam=11592208937&hsa\\_grp=118672749491&hsa\\_ad=478927557989&hsa\\_src=g&hsa\\_tgt=kwd-354100062913&hsa\\_kw=christians%20being%20killed&hsa\\_mt=b&hsa\\_net=adwords&hsa\\_ver=3&gclid=Cj0KCQiA7NKBbDBARIsAHbXC B6\\_NIGfkqn8XWSIHmRZ-kxOFbn1F2kkNEySEeKyENQB9k\\_ZBzkUvCcaAivfEALw\\_wcB](https://forthemartyrs.com/10-facts-about-christian-persecution/?utm_term=christians%20being%20killed&utm_campaign=Christian+Persecution&utm_source=adwords&utm_medium=ppc&hsa_acc=9723476535&hsa_cam=11592208937&hsa_grp=118672749491&hsa_ad=478927557989&hsa_src=g&hsa_tgt=kwd-354100062913&hsa_kw=christians%20being%20killed&hsa_mt=b&hsa_net=adwords&hsa_ver=3&gclid=Cj0KCQiA7NKBbDBARIsAHbXC B6_NIGfkqn8XWSIHmRZ-kxOFbn1F2kkNEySEeKyENQB9k_ZBzkUvCcaAivfEALw_wcB)

address. It was during the war time and everyone expect this powerful leader, who had held his country together against Hitler, to give a very inspiring speech. However, Churchill walked up to the podium and said only three words: "Never give up!" Then he paused and said: "Never give up!" And he paused even longer and said: "Never give up!" And then he returned to his seat.

Jesus came to this third verse on the final beatitude, and He reminded us not to give up because we are not alone; there were many prophets in history that were misunderstood and persecuted in the same way. One of the ways we can be encouraged is to read the biographies of the martyred saints. If you are not familiar with it, I'd encourage you to read a book called *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, written by John Foxe and first published in 1563 (it has been updated through the centuries). Foxe wrote his book in tribute to Christian martyrs, beginning with Stephen in the book of Acts – the first believer who died for the cause of Christ. Foxe's original work ended with the martyrs of his own day. He wanted the Church to remember the martyrs, because he knew that the blood of the martyrs truly is the seed of the Church.

Martyrdom is not a thing of the past. The Christian Church continues to endure great persecution in many places around the world. In fact, more Christians were affected by persecution, including martyrdom, during the twentieth century than in all previous centuries combined.

I'd encourage you to read Foxe's book; it will stir you, challenge you, and inspire you to surrender everything to Christ.<sup>6</sup> It will remind you that God will protect you, it will remind you of what you want to die for, and it will remind you to never give up.

*Pray*

Don't be a peace breaker or a peace faker; be peacemakers, but realize that as you gain peace for others, you yourself might be persecuted for it. Still, you can rejoice in being persecuted, remembering that God will protect you – he's promised to. You'll be firm in facing it because you already know what you will die for, and so you will never give up! This is your greatest privilege, beatitude-living Christian; so rejoice!

Please stand for the benediction:

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:33-34, niv)

Therefore, go into our world and be peacemakers, considering yourself blessed if you are persecuted because of it, because you will be called children of God and yours is the Kingdom of Heaven.

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<sup>6</sup> From the description of *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. <https://www.amazon.com/Foxes-Book-Martyrs-Pure-Classics/dp/0882708759>