

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

*Andrew Willis*

In 1873, Samuel Colt introduced a new pistol and called it 'The Peacekeeper.' It was different from previous hand guns; it had a simple design, and it used bullets, or shell cartridges rather than older style loaders. In fact it was so simple and easy to use that anyone could learn to use this weapon. Not only was it easy to load, but the graduated sight made it straightforward to aim and fire. At the time it was said that although God made every man different, Sam Colt made them equal. For the first time a larger, stronger person could no longer overpower a smaller, weaker one and get away with it. What previously depended on strength now depended on speed and accuracy- something anyone could practice.

In November 1982, American president Ronald Reagan introduced a new mobile missile to the world, calling it 'The Peacekeeper.' This missile, because of mobility and more modern guidance systems, was claimed would keep the peace on earth by acting as deterrent.

Peacekeepers. The word calls to mind images of armed soldiers patrolling the demilitarized zone in Korea, the blue berets on the armed forces seconded to the UN standing on the peace line in Cyprus, or warrior armoured personal carriers in the Balkans. The pictures we see, the stories we read, the sound bites we hear all tell us that if in this world you want to keep the peace then, you had better be prepared to enforce it. If you are going to keep the peace it seems that you need to be armed. Not only that but you should be better armed and better prepared than the other sides involved in the conflict.

And yet despite the numbers of peacekeepers, the number of armed interventions, the numbers of United Nations resolutions, world is not at peace. It would appear that 'peacekeeping' does not work very well.

In the last century as many as 50 million men, women, and children are thought to have died as a result of armed conflict and war. It has been estimated that in over 3100 years of recorded world history, we have only been at peace for 8% of the time. In other words a total of just

286 years. It is also estimate that during our history more than 8000 treaties have been made and broken.

What most people do not seem to understand is that peace is not something that can be imposed from the outside. You cannot 'keep' a peace that isn't there.

John MacArthur says, 'A truce just says you don't shoot for awhile. Peace comes when the truth is known, the issue is settled, and the parties embrace each other.'

This is why when Jesus instructs his followers what to do if they want to be known as the children of God he did not tell them to be peacekeepers.

**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.** (Matt 5.9)

It's important to note that Jesus, the 'Prince of Peace', asks his disciples not to be peacekeepers, but peacemakers, 'blessed are the peacemakers.'

A peacekeeper is a person who enforces, by whatever means, by force of personality or by superior weapons, a truce. A peacemaker is one who actually discovers the origin of the conflict, and finds a way to resolve it, and helps the parties to restore a proper, loving relationship. This applies to individuals or nations. He or she actually 'makes' or 'constructs' peace.

Jesus is rejecting the idea of a forced peace. Jesus is rejecting the idea that superior power, superior weaponry can be the basis of a lasting peace. Jesus is rejecting the idea that one party can compel another to desire peace. And by insisting that his followers become peacemakers rather than peacekeepers, Jesus is pointing us to the Old Testament. By rejecting violence as a solution, Jesus is reminding us of the words of the prophet Micah.

Micah 4

**He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning- hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more;** (Mic 4.3)

The prophet Micah shares a vision of peace. A time when countries will solve their problems through discussion and compromise rather than by war. War will not even be a option anymore; their weapons will be decommissioned. They will be turned from implements of death into tools of life. War will become a distant memory, future generations will not even prepare for it.

According to Micah this peace is based not on force, or the threat of violence. Rather as it says in vs. 4.

... they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken. (Mic 4.4)

Haden Robinson, writer of *Salt and Light* says, 'No peace will exist between nations until peace reigns in each country. And no country will have peace until peace dwells with the people. And no people will have peace until they surrender to the prince of peace.'

Micah explains that everyone has a share in the advantages of peace. No one goes hungry, no one is disenfranchised, no one is left on the margins, and poverty is forgotten.

From both a Christian and a practical perspective, for there to be a lasting peace at least four things need to be present.

Firstly there must be dialogue and discussion in stead of war cries. Lasting peace comes not from violence but from negotiation, dialogue, and compromise. Violence and force needs to be replaced by discourse and reasoning.

Secondly there must be justice. Unfortunately as we look at the world around us the world is full of injustice. Justice goes hand in hand with peace. Injustice will never lead to peace. Poverty and exploitation breed discontent and hopelessness, which leads to desperation and violence.

Justice requires respect for human rights, human dignity and human difference. Justice requires that poverty, marginalization, resentment and hostility be resolved before peace becomes possible.

The thirdly for peace to last we need forgiveness. We know that we need to ask for forgiveness to heal broken personal relationships; yet we often forget that there may need to be corporate or national forgiveness. If there is to be peace, it is important that old arguments be forgotten, that the past be buried and that we look to the future. This act of forgiveness is necessary to break the cycle of resentment, hate and revenge. Bygones must be bygones. We must forgive and look towards the fourth stage, reconciliation.

Reconciliation is the restoration of relationships which have become hostile and estranged. It builds upon the foundation provided by forgiveness. Without reconciliation there can be no cooperation, harmony, or peace.

These four elements are to be found in the vision of peace set before us by the prophet Micah. But I can hear some of you complaining. The context for Micah chapter 4 you argue is that of the Messianic restoration at the end of time. It points towards the earth recreated and is not meant to be a model for us today, I hear you say.

Yes Micah chapter 4 refers to the kingdom of God. However, whilst this earth will find complete peace under the 'Prince of Peace', I believe that its message also has a more contemporary application as well.

A few weeks ago we were reminded of the incarnation of Jesus and his birth in Bethlehem. At his birth angel choirs appeared to the shepherds ushering an era of peace on earth.

Once Jesus started his ministry, as we read the gospel stories we hear that he declared that the kingdom of God had arrived. In the Sermon on the Mount he spelt out the values of the kingdom to his followers and his lifestyle challenged his followers to live as citizens of the kingdom of God.

Whilst the temporal kingdom of God will only be installed at the end of this earth's history, Jesus had ushered in the spiritual kingdom of God.

Because he our peace, in his flesh he made both groups into one and broke down the dividing wall, of hostility between us (Eph 2.14), he reconciled us to his father and granted us

As Christians and citizens of the kingdom we have responsibilities and duties. One of those is clearly the call to be peacemakers. As we have seen it is included in the Sermon on the Mount. It is a requirement if we are to be called God's children. We read other references to it throughout the gospels.

We often remind ourselves of the idea of Christians being the light and salt to the world (Mat 5.13-14). We like to remind ourselves of our witness to the world around us, and yet we often forget that in the Gospel of Mark this witness is linked to the idea of peacemaking.

Mk 9.50

**Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.**

In other words our peacemaking will act as a witness to others. People will be drawn to the 'Prince of Peace' through our acts of peacemaking.

We are called to be peacemakers. At home, between family members; at work between colleagues and friends; in church, between members; in our communities and society, and even between nations.

This morning, peace looks far away. It appears as we are not so much drifting to war as sprinting towards it. The biggest military build up in years looks hard to stop and our leaders seem intent on war. As Christians with a call to peacemaking how are we to respond. As citizens of the kingdom of God are we going to take seriously the call to make peace?

Some may feel that a church service is not the time or the place to talk about it. Some are uncomfortable about what they see as the politicising of our faith. Some believe our Christian duty is to support our society's leaders.

But as our study of the bible has shown us this morning; now is the time, now is the place. If we are to take seriously Jesus' statement in Matthew 5.9, then we need to respond.

And just in case the biblical mandate is not enough, we also have the Seventh-day Adventist Church's official statement, voted last year. I'll put a copy on the board after the service in

Church's role in educating for peace and it calls on the Church's pastor's to use their pulpits to proclaim the message of peacemaking.

The first thing we need to do is dialogue, we need to ask questions and look for answers. We need to know what is happening so that we can make a judgement and so that we can act.

At this particular moment in time, I personally believe, along with almost all the Christian leaders who have spoken out, that a war with Iraq, as it currently stands does not meet the criterion (which has been a central part of Christian tradition) for a just war. I am not an apologist for the Iraqi government, I do not support their leader and would like to see him go, however from a Christian standpoint, I do not believe the argument for a just war has been made.

That is my view. Don't accept it for yourself without careful deliberation and thought. If you want to know more about the traditional view of a just war just speak to me later. If you disagree then that is a matter for your conscience. If you believe, along with many Christians that war is never just; I know that you have already thought long and hard about being a peacemaker. All I am asking is that we accept the seriousness of Jesus' call to radical citizenship of the kingdom of God.

If you share my view, if you believe God is calling you to be a peacemaker, then what are we going to do about it?

Firstly pray. Ask for the 'Prince of Peace' to intervene. Never underestimate the power of prayer.

Secondly do something. Join with a group of likeminded people. You may have about the Adventist Peace and Justice Fellowship. You may know of other at work or in your neighbourhoods. It is time to be the salt. It is time to be peacemakers.

The first Christian creed was the simple confession 'Jesus is Lord.' Lord, *kyrios*, lord, king, Caesar, today we might say king, prime minister or president. Biblically to confess Jesus as lord means that whilst we pay respect and support our countries leaders, they are not really

our leader. If Jesus is Lord, no other leader deserves unquestioned support. Every Christian, every child of God, every citizen of the kingdom of God must obey God, not human beings.

That means that it is not wrong to protest when you believe that your leaders are going against your beliefs. Contact your representatives, your MP's, MSP's, councillors, union reps, and register your desire to be a peacemaker. Join in non-violent demonstrations. Sign petitions, write to papers, and spread your saltiness. And when people ask why you oppose war, tell them it is because of your Christian principles. Don't hide it. Season those around you.

Many people who believed that the church was out of touch and irrelevant are finding that it now represents their views- what an opportunity to show true kingdom values to a society that wants so much more out of life.

This morning, as Christians we look forward to the events foreshadowed in Micah and prophesied in the book of Revelations:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (21.1-2)

However we are also reminded that we are already citizens of that kingdom and have been called to live out its values in this world today.

This morning I challenge us all to be peacemakers.