Matthew - Commentaries by L. Douglas Nicolet

The Christian Shepherd: 1997, Peacemakers or Pieces-Makers?

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“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matt. 5:9).

Recently we were considering with a beloved brother the vital importance of peacemakers among brethren, in view of the day in which we live. He mentioned that when ministering one time where a difficultly was threatening to divide some of God’s dear people, he had pointed out that the Word says, “Blessed are the peacemakers,” not “the pieces-makers.” We feel this is a seasonable word to our hearts, especially because of the ever-increasing efforts of the enemy to create confusion and strife in the assembly. Sometimes self-will and disobedience create circumstances in the assembly or family which must be dealt with in order that there can be peace. But let us ever remember that the “God of peace,” whom we know as our Father, tells us to be “at peace among yourselves” (1 Thess. 5:13). We are also taught in all our relationships as believers to be found “if possible, as far as depends on you, living in peace with all men” (Rom. 12:18 JND). And, as brethren, we are enjoined to be always “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

We have a perfect pattern of a peacemaker in our blessed Lord Jesus. As to His blessed person, He is our peace. As to His work, He has made peace, bringing Jew and Gentile together as one, and He has, as to His Word, preached peace to both the far and the near (Eph. 2:14-15,17). We learn from the divine pattern that one wishing to be a peacemaker must be guided by the Spirit in order that what he seeks to say and do for those who are at odds with each other will be morally in keeping with what he is personally in his walk with God.

However, the believer is not long in this wilderness before realizing that there is a “time of war,” as well as “a time of peace.” As much as we might desire peace, that condition cannot exist when that which dishonors God is allowed. And so, at times, the child of God is engaged in conflict rather than being able to enjoy peace. The spirit in which he enters into conflict, however, will determine whether the outcome results in sweet peace or sorrowful pieces.

This principle is strikingly illustrated in the sad account of the sin of the tribe of Benjamin (Judg. 19-21). The men of Gibeah committed a wicked abomination which caused the death of the Levite’s concubine. Each of the twelve tribes received a piece of the body of the violated woman, identifying them with this wicked act (Judg. 19:29-30). Only the tribe of Benjamin, where the abomination had taken place, remained indifferent to the holy claims of Jehovah. Their conscience was so hardened that they went to war with their brethren in defense of those who were guilty (Judg. 20:12-14).

On the other hand, the eleven tribes seemed eager in spirit to execute righteous judgment on the guilty. They were right in their abhorrence of this wickedness, but they did not realize what God thought of their own self-righteous zeal. He must first judge their spirit before He could use them as an instrument of judgment on the sin of Benjamin. Their spirit is sadly evidenced by the question they ask Jehovah: “Which of us shall go up first to the battle?” How sad! They were eager to be the instrument of vengeance, without feeling proper sorrow that, for their brother Benjamin, there was no peace to the wicked. The eleven tribes were as guilty of being pieces-makers in their eagerness to set things right as Benjamin was in his fellowship with the awful sin of Gibeah. The result of Jehovah’s dealings with Israel’s spirit is solemn to consider. Over forty thousand warriors of Israel were slain before their spirit was broken. What a terrible price to pay for an unsubdued spirit! May we carefully guard our spirits when entering into conflict, remembering the rebuke of the blessed Lord Jesus when His beloved disciples would call down fire from heaven against those who opposed them: “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of ” (Luke 9:55).

After this, when Israel gathered, weeping, before Jehovah at Bethel (Judg. 20:26), proving the reality of “a broken and a contrite heart,” the sin that Benjamin would not judge was fully judged by Jehovah’s using these humbled and subdued brethren (Judg. 20:46). Then as they viewed the results of this righteous judgment on Benjamin, the eleven tribes felt deep sorrow at the pieces of God’s heritage that sin had caused. Because they were now a repentant and subdued nation, Israel was in a morally suited condition to become true peacemakers. The peacemaking began with an even greater humbling of their hearts. “And the people came to the house of God, and abode there till even before God, and lifted up their voices, and wept sore; and said, O Lord God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be today one tribe lacking in Israel?” (Judg. 21:24). This was true moral preparation for peacemaking. Weeping in sorrow for the few pieces that were left of Benjamin, they desired his preservation in order that Jehovah’s inheritance would not be marred.

The desire of Israel’s heart then shows in their actions. Going to where the few remaining pieces of Benjamin were hiding, “the whole congregation sent some to speak to the children of Benjamin that were in the rock Rimmon, and to call peaceably unto them.” The beautiful result of their efforts at being peacemakers was that “Benjamin came again at that time” (Judg. 21:13-14). The eleven tribes, who had at one time been pieces-makers, acting now in the character of peacemakers have the joy of seeing “the children of Benjamin” return “unto their inheritance” and repair “the cities” and dwell in them (Judg. 21:23). What joy that must have been to their hearts! The whole nation of Israel was cleared from the wickedness that had so dishonored Jehovah, their guilty brother was restored and once again enjoying his possession, and fellowship again existed among all twelve tribes.

God grant that we may always have the heartfelt desire to be peacemakers in our homes and in the assembly. Pieces-makers will not keep the body of Christ fitted together and connected. Let us seek to do all within our power that the testimony of the body of Christ be maintained in peace, for we “are one body in Christ, and each one members one of the other” (Rom. 12:5 JND). How blessed it will be in that coming day of glory to hear the Lord voice His approval and appreciation to those who truly sought to be peacemakers among those who are members of that which is so infinitely precious to His heart: the church which He loved and gave Himself for!

“Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (Rom. 14:19). “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matt. 5:9).

D. Nicolet

The Christian Shepherd: 2001, Editorial: "Take the Young Child"

“When they [the wise men] were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and His mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy Him. When he arose, he took the young child and His mother by night, and departed into Egypt” (Matt. 2:13-14).

These two verses present sweet comfort for parents who are raising children in this dark world. The principles it contains are priceless—divine wisdom for guiding and preserving them. However, the time that parents have to hide their little children is exceedingly short—just a few precious years. Oh! that we all might pray earnestly for needed strength, wisdom and courage for parents.

Headship and Nurturing

“The angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and His mother.”

It is to Joseph as head of his house that the angel of the Lord gives instructions concerning his family. While it was through a dream in Joseph’s day, today such instruction will be received by daily prayer, reading of God’s Word, and walking in fellowship with the Father.

If a father doesn’t fulfill his God-given place of spiritual leadership, the mother may feel pressured to assume that role while also trying to maintain her place in the home as nurturer. Though the Lord surely appreciates and blesses personal faithfulness, such failure on the father’s part may lead to sad results in the lives of the dear children.

In verse 11 we read that when the wise men were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother. This is the divine and lovely pattern for families—a mother found nurturing and caring for her child in the house, while it is to Joseph—the head of the house—that the angel comes with instructions for the care and protecting of his family.

Flee or Fight?

“And flee.”

Joseph was to flee from Herod the destroyer, not stand up and fight against him. Today believers are becoming increasingly engaged in organized conflicts against evil. Christians feel tremendous pressure to “return our country to Christian values” through various social, political and religious movements. But the word to Joseph was to flee from the murderous Herod, not to try to change his mind. We will be far more effective (and feel far more persecution too) if we simply and faithfully live our Christianity in the fear of God, each day.

Fleeing Into Egypt

“Into Egypt.”

Though it may seem strange that the Lord Jesus was to be taken into Egypt to escape Herod’s wrath, we must remember that these divine, unerring instructions have been recorded for our learning.

It was to Egypt that Joseph called his father Jacob and his brethren, that he might preserve them from famine. It is not the Lord’s will that we go out of the world in seeking to preserve our families, for He prayed to the Father, “I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (John 17:15). Thus Christian parents can find a place to flee, using this world as a hiding place (though not abusing it; 1 Cor. 7:31).

Those who raised families in past generations used means which may not be available to or wise for families to use today. Public education, for example, had far more Christian character. It was provided in relatively safe, stable environments and was family oriented. Parents sent children to public school with some confidence that their Christian values would not be purposely undermined.

Today, however, many find that the flood of violence, corruption and godlessness in public schools in many communities is part of an active subversion of Christianity—making it a dangerous place for our children.

Seeking a right path for our little ones today requires fresh, deep soul exercise before the Lord.

Hiding Is Not Attaching or Promoting

Let us also remember that the things of the world used to hide children must never be allowed to become more important than our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. There are multitudes of beneficial enjoyments and activities—but never are they to become substitutes for Christ and that satisfaction which is found alone in Him. Now Christ alone can satisfy.

Remember, dear dads and moms, the key word is hide. Whatever means is used in this world to hide your children from the destroyer will have a separating influence. It will certainly not be that which promotes them in, displays their talents to, or attaches their hearts with this present evil world.

Egypt Is Not Our Final Destination

“And be thou there until I bring thee word.”

The time would come when Joseph would be told by the Lord to bring his family out of Egypt. But attached hearts cannot be easily or willingly taken from an object which has captured them. Ever impress on your dear children that this world is but a temporary place for those who look “for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10).

Many have read The Hiding Place, the incredible World War II story by Corrie ten Boom. It tells how her family hid Jews from their enemies in secret compartments built inside their house. As long as those Jews who fled to the ten Boom's house for refuge remained hidden out of sight, they were safe from the destroyer. But we are sure that none of those hidden there became attached in heart to the tiny, stifling spaces where they lived in such fear those long, dreary months. How strange, after the war, when the Jews were again free to enjoy the full freedom of that land, to have found one who wanted to go back to those dark, secret rooms in the ten Boom house and live there the rest of his life!

While this world, in God's mercy, is available as a temporary place to hide our little ones—it is only until the Lord brings word to leave. Never allow a hiding place to become a final destination. The Lord commanded Lot to leave Sodom and escape to the mountain for safety. But his wife and children (except for two unmarried daughters) would not go and were destroyed in that solemn judgment.

Who Is the Enemy?

"Herod will seek the young child to destroy Him."

Satan is the god and prince of this world (2 Cor. 4:4). Be very clear about this, dear parents: The enemy is seeking nothing less than the destruction of your children. Never underestimate his hatred of you, your marriage and your children—even as he hates all that is of God. Never underestimate the trouble he will take to destroy those precious things. Be faithful and diligent, remembering that greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.

Fleeing Immediately and at Night

"When he arose, he took the young child and His mother by night, and departed."

Immediate obedience to the Lord's Word is so vitally important—immediate, unquestioned obedience. "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22).

Fleeing must be done by night—that very time when it is most difficult to see. To flee with your family requires faith. Parents may not always be able to see immediate results, nor will they be able to see all the dangers. But faith obeys, trusting God for the results, even when all is dark. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house" (Heb. 11:7).

No Excuses Needed

Night also suggests that fleeing shouldn't be made a matter of public display. Paul escaped at night (Acts 9:25) so that he would not have to meet those who sought to kill him. Parents needn't justify their actions of faith and obedience to a world that spit in the blessed face of God's well-beloved Son! In observing this energy of faith in Christian parents, the world, which has none, will only seek to hinder and turn aside these vitally important exercises.

Our children have God-given talents and abilities. The world recognizes this too and will actively seek to steal them if allowed to see them. But those things have been given for the blessing of God's dear people, not the advancement of this wicked world. Hide their talents from the robber—at night—even as you hide themselves from the destroyer.

And ever remember that the Lord Jesus spent His childhood, teen and young adult years hidden and virtually unknown except to those in the little village of Nazareth. Yet He was God the Son—Creator of all!

May God grant the energy of faith to dear parents—that they will arise and flee to hide their little ones so that they may be preserved for Christ.

Ed.

The Christian Shepherd: 1998, Editorial: Two Keys to Blessing

"The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here" (Matt. 12:41-42).

What was it that saved the people of Nineveh? They acted in faith upon the prophet Jonah's warning and repented. What was it that brought blessing and joy to the heart of the Queen of Sheba? She submitted to one Solomon whose glory was far greater than her own. These two things repentance and submission are very important keys to happiness in a Christian's life.

The Lord Jesus, speaking of Himself to the Jews, said, "A greater than Jonas... a greater than Solomon is here." He, infinitely greater in Person, glory, power and love, was ready to bring the promised time of rich blessing to the suffering nation of Israel. But two things were standing in the way of the promised blessings made to the fathers. The Jews would not repent of their rebellion against Jehovah and His rightful claims over them, and they would not submit their haughty hearts—hearts which desperately sought for earthly glory to the glory (seen by faith) of the Messiah who stood in their midst.

The Lord graciously uttered those probing words that their conscience might be exercised. Though the inhabitants of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba were despised Gentiles, their repentant and submissive spirits qualified them for the rich blessings they received.

We also see many bright examples of these two principles in the New Testament. The despised publican repented before God, owning what he was a sinner and went home eternally blessed (Luke 18:914). The despised Gentile mother whose daughter was grievously possessed with a demon received the desire of her heart when she humbled herself in the presence of His glory (Matt. 15:21-28).

In Psalm 51:17 David says, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."

Today, believers can also enjoy individually, in families and in assemblies the same rich fruits of blessing by walking in a spirit of repentance and submission. Surely God delights in blessing His children who walk in this obedient spirit!

“Prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Mal. 3:10).

Ed.

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