*DEVOTIONS*

February 20 - 25

*Blessed are the peacemakers*

**Monday, February 20 Matthew 24:4-8**

*“You will hear of wars and rumors of wars”*

 It seems that achieving peace is a topic of almost every newscast, every daily newspaper in the United States, and in many of our discussions with each other. Peacemaking and peacekeeping is a concern in international relations, within our own country, between persons, and in our families. In these verses, Jesus is teaching that there will always be wars and rumors of wars. Indeed, there will be no lasting peace on earth until Jesus reigns in the new heaven and new earth as described in the book of Revelation.

 How, then, do disciples of Jesus live in a world where, for the time being, there is conflict and strife of every kind, between nations and ideologies as well as between individuals? In the Old Testament, *peace* is the Hebrew word *shalom,* a common greeting or farewell which meant *peace, completeness, welfare,* and *health.* This means wishing a person the very best in life. But, when conditions exist that hinder *shalom*, a peacemaker is needed to minister in the situation to help bring it about. We are called to help bring *shalom* to others.

*Where there is conflict, Lord, show me how to promote your peace. Amen.*

**Tuesday, February 21 Isaiah 48:17-22**

*“Then you would have had peace”*

 Isaiah identifies God as “Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel,” and “your God.” These ways of speaking about God show him to be a God of grace and love. He cares deeply for his people, and he cares deeply about the choices we make and the directions our lives take. So he has made his will known to us and called us to follow it. For the Israelites in Isaiah’s day, if they had paid attention to God’s will in the past, none of the tragedies they are currently experiencing would have occurred. Instead, they would have had peace.

 But even though they did not listen in the past, that does not mean God has been defeated by their sin and has given up on them. If they will believe God now they can be delivered from Babylon, into which their deaf ears and hardened hearts have brought them. For the One who created the earth is capable of redeeming those whom he has created. Then, those who confess their sin and accept his forgiveness will experience peace with God. However, for the wicked who continue to reject God, there is no peace.

*You offer me peace with yourself, Lord. Confessing my sin, I accept. Amen.*

**Wednesday, February 22 Romans 5:1-2**

*“We have peace with God”*

 Up to this point in his letter to the Romans, Paul’s focus has been on the power of the gospel to bring people who are locked up in sin and under sentence of eternal death into a right relationship with God. Through the preaching of the good news, God invites all people to believe in Christ and enter into this new relationship. Now Paul turns his attention to what comes after one’s salvation by faith.

 The first result of the new status God has given us in Christ is “peace with God.” The Greek word used here for peace is *eirene,* a word that does not primarily denote a relationship between people, but a particular ongoing status such as a “time of peace” or a “state of peace” understood as an interlude in the everlasting state of war. So, what Paul is saying is that through the work of Christ, humankind can be set free from the “everlasting state of war” between God and people and be at peace with God. This state of peace, Paul goes on to say, leads to a sense of confidence and joy in God’s presence.

*Being at peace with you, Lord, I am freed from sin to live joyfully. Amen.*

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*Blessed are the peacemakers*

**Thursday, February 23 2 Corinthians 5:18-21**

*“God has given us the task of reconciling people to him”*

 Paul states that we have a responsibility to bring people to Jesus Christ for salvation whereby they can experience forgiveness of sin and be at peace with God. By entrusting us with the message of reconciliation, God’s desire is not that we merely use it for our own relationship with him, but that we engage in an active and purposeful ministry of sharing the message so that others may experience reconciliation.

 In the sense that every child has some kind of relationship with his or her parent, whether good or bad, every person lives in some kind of relationship with God. It was God’s intention from the beginning for people to live in a relationship of trust and obedience. But sin entered the world and created a hostility to God’s will and an estrangement from him. Then God acted through Christ to reach out in love and reestablish the relationship. When Paul defines his ministry and ours, he takes a phrase from the world of politics. “We are ambassadors for Christ,” representing Christ in the world.

*May I share you with others, Lord, so they may be at peace with you. Amen.*

**Friday, February 24 Romans 12:17-21**

*“As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone”*

 No doubt, when the Roman believers read Paul’s words that they were to “live at peace with everyone,” there was a similar reaction to the one expressed by modern readers: “How can I be expected to live at peace with those who are intent on conflict?” The answer is, “You are not expected to do the impossible. You are to do what is possible, ‘as far as it depends on you.’” In other words, we are all responsible for our own actions but cannot be held responsible for the actions of others. So, do what you can, attempt what is possible, and leave the consequences of the other person’s reaction to God.

 Paul also stresses that we are to recognize that, while evil actions will be punished, that does not mean we are the punishers. The key thought is expressed by Paul’s quotation of Deuteronomy 21:35, “’Vengeance is mine, . . . ‘ says the Lord.” The temptation to take matters into our own hands and to see to it that evil is repaid with evil must be resisted. Only then is there even the possibility of peace.

*Help me, Lord, to overcome evil by using the good that you have given me. Amen.*

**Saturday, February 27 Matthew 5:1-10**

*“Blessed are the peacemakers”*

A peacemaker is a person with a God-given view of self, of others, and of the world. The view of self sets aside self-interest and self-concern in order to avoid the desire to “win” or to “be right” in a dispute. Further, when seeking to bring two sides together, a peacemaker – a reconciler – must be neutral. We must be sensitive but not touchy, seeking the best for others rather than asking, “What’s in this for me?”

 With this new view of self, the peacemaker is better able to see others as God sees them. We begin to understand that we all have weaknesses, and we love others in spite of the things that we don’t like about them. One can only be a peacemaker when one truly cares for others. The peacemaker also has a particular view of the world as the place in which we are called to actively live the effective presence of God, a presence which brings about peace. Individual and international conflict was never God’s intention, and those who work for peace are seeking to bring glory to God by working for peace in his world.

*As your child, Lord, help me to bring your peace to others. Amen.*