

Peace of God

Fault-finding is not peacemaking, and you are not the Savior

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, December 13, 2020
PASSAGES	Isaiah 58:3-10; Isaiah 59:14-20; Isaiah 55:1-8; Matthew 5:9; Isaiah 9:6; Luke 18:9-14; Daniel 3:16-18; Luke 11:13; Luke 18:1-8
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:51:30 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

“Blessed are the peacemakers.” We long for peace, but making it is a creative, godly and profoundly difficult work, and it is easy to settle for smoke and mirrors – fault-finding, comparison, the look of piety. The relief is that we are not Jesus. The government rests on his shoulders. He is the Prince of Peace; our part is to stay faithful, keep praying, and come to the waters he offers.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ There have always been times like these. Mobs, riots and arguments about masks were not invented in 2020.
- ◆ God creates; the devil can only twist and distort. Peacemaking is godly precisely because it makes something that is not there – which is why it is so hard.
- ◆ Finding fault is not the same as making peace, just as sending a disruptive student out of class is not the same as teaching the lesson.
- ◆ Through Isaiah, God contrasts the appearance of piety with its substance: loosing the bonds of wickedness, feeding the hungry, and taking away the pointing finger.
- ◆ God does not ask for virtue as another metric to catch us failing. He cares for the orphan and the widow because he loves them.

- ◆ The church is not one food drive away from ending hunger. Take off the savior-of-the-universe hat; the Redeemer has come to Zion.
- ◆ Our role is faithfulness, like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego: it was their job to stand, and God's to stand with them.

► 0:51:30

After the previous Sunday's Christmas party on the lawn – "I wasn't sure anyone was going to come at all" – Matt reminded the church of *Reset*, Hope's book of testimonies from its own people. One chapter tells Jose's story, and Jose had loved handing the book to the people he painted for. "Geno's been reminding us it's good to talk about it. Tell your stories." Then a joke from his kids: "When do most people go to the dentist? Tooth-hurty."

The too-long-didn't-read version

► 0:54:14

Last week was about a grieving community, Matt said; this week, a country that wants peace. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." He gave the summary up front: we long for peace and virtue, but peacemaking is very hard, and many settle for smoke-and-mirrors versions. That is the heavy part.

► 0:56:05

"But the relieving part is that we are not Jesus Christ. He is the actual Savior of the world. The government rests upon his shoulders, not ours" (Isaiah 9:6). "The captain of our army is on the field. He's not AWOL. We're not preaching a kingless kingdom."

1. There have always been times like these

► 0:56:33

Take your pick of what people were unhappy about: masks or no masks, whether Donald Trump won or did not, the summer's riots. But there were riots under Barack Obama too. "These guys didn't invent pitchforks and torches." People argued about masks during the 1918 flu. And our longing to feel significant can quickly decay into "at least I'm not as bad as that guy."

► 0:59:02

A side note about God: he is creative, and what he makes is substantive, light and vibrant. The devil cannot create out of nothing; he can only twist, dilute, distort and destroy. "Peacemaking is a godly task

because you're making something that's not there." That is why it is so hard. Back to his teaching days: "Kicking a kid out of class for being disruptive is not the same thing as teaching the lesson." You can have an orderly room where no one learns. "Finding out where other people are making peace worse is not the same thing as making peace."

► 1:00:10

Virtue is hard too. Matt loves John Crist's sketch about a man in Home Depot who plans to remodel his bathroom "later this afternoon." "I think later this afternoon I'm going to be a profoundly patient man." Like gym memberships that open in January and close in February, we live in "from now on" places. "I don't know how much darkness we're going to beat back on our own efforts."

2. The appearance and the substance

► 1:01:45

Staying in Isaiah, he turned to chapter 58 to see "the impressive nature of mankind's ability to virtue."

"Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it? Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist... Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?"

ISAIAH 58:3-7 ↗

► 1:02:26

"Can you just imagine saying that to God – have you noticed I've been super humble?" And a warning against "cranky fasting": if you are yelling at your spouse from hunger, "maybe dial it back a little." Here is the difference between the substance of God's peace and its appearance: bowing your head and sitting on special cloth, versus freeing the oppressed and feeding the hungry. "There's a huge, unbelievable difference."

► 1:05:03

Verse 9 goes on: "If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness" (Isaiah 58:9-10). During the 2020 unrest Matt received a flurry of "Dear Pastor" emails – the nation needs this, sign up, send money – much of it spiritual-sounding, "but at the

core of it a lot of it was also finger-pointing.” “You don’t have to be that prophetic to find faults in other people.” And fault-finding feels good, “not in a good way.” So his rule for the church’s prayer nights was: nothing political, not even backhandedly – no “Lord, deliver us from the Democrats,” no “Lord, deliver us from the orange man.” Just waiting on the Lord and humbling ourselves.

► 1:07:53

Before turning the corner, sit there a moment. God does not hand us virtue as another metric to decide whether we are “a goodie or a baddie,” waiting to say, “I knew you’d fail.” He longs for the orphan to be cared for because they have no father, for the widow because she has no husband, for the hungry to be fed because he loves them. “One of the reasons why God hates sin so much is because he loves people.”

► 1:08:59

Still, it is frustrating to long for peace and not know what to do. So Matt wanted to dismantle a narrative: that “we the church will fill the abyss of human need.” “There is someone that can, but it’s not you, and if you don’t know what role you’re playing, it’ll crush you.” Under that pressure we reach for comparison, like the Pharisee who thanked God he was not like the tax collector ([Luke 18:9–14](#)) – and we must not then thank God we are not like that Pharisee. That kind of virtue “is just smoke and mirrors.”

3. Take off the savior-of-the-universe hat

► 1:10:46

This is where a pastor might say: if you cared enough, you would try harder. “I think we’re one food drive away from ending hunger forever. We could do it, guys.” Matt did not buy it. There is a fresh generation of need all the time; we are not one clothing drive from ending poverty. “You really need to take off the savior-of-the-universe hat, find your place in this world, and look to the one who can meet deep needs.” He dislikes the manipulative “if you cared, you’d do something,” as if there were no King on the throne and we had to warm up the world so Jesus would feel comfortable coming back. “But he’s the one preparing a place for us.”

► 1:12:40

“Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him.”

ISAIAH 59:14–16 ↗

► 1:13:30

Read Kings and Chronicles, Matt said, and the “almost revivals” are frustrating. We long for a selfless leader, acquainted with our sorrows, with real authority and trustworthy with it. Every human leader failed somewhere; every revival petered out. “Then in the fullness of time, what may have appeared to be out of nowhere, the hero of the ages steps on the scene, shining into the darkness” – with his incarnation, his sufferings, and a faithfulness no leader ever showed.

► 1:15:57

Isaiah says it right after that dark picture: no one could intercede, so God’s own arm brought salvation. He put on righteousness as a breastplate and salvation as a helmet, “and a Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression” (Isaiah 59:17–20). So it is good to know our fanciful efforts at virtue are empty, that true peacemaking is difficult and godly – and to know our role. “You cannot adopt every orphan, take care of every widow, feed every hungry person, get everybody a job.” “We long for a Savior for a reason. There’s only one person that fits that job.”

4. Know your role

► 1:17:18

Think of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. It was not their job to topple the king or change public perception – “public awareness campaigns are fine, you can print the shirts.” Their job was to stay faithful: keep praying and refuse to bow. When they were thrown into the fire, “it was their job to stand. It was God’s role to stand with them.” God is the kingmaker and empire-overturner, the one who changes hearts and draws people to his Son. “We are his entourage. We are his posse.”

► 1:19:11

And when he gives us something to do, he does it with us. “It’s not a pyramid scheme where he sends out his pawns and waits in his office.” And like those three men – “if he delivers us or not, we’re still going to stay faithful” (Daniel 3:16–18) – our role is faithfulness, even when things do not turn out as we wanted.

5. Come to the waters

► 1:19:51

The church by God’s grace can bring real healing, but the depth of suffering is too big for us. “Thankfully the church isn’t the answer. Ultimately there is someone who is.” “Come, everyone who thirsts” – “not ‘come to all the pastors,’ not ‘come to all the greeters and ushers, they will save you.’”

► 1:20:25

“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live... Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near... for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.”

ISAIAH 55:1-8 ↗

► 1:21:40

“There’s the invitation. There’s the resolution of the conflict. He is the resolution.” The answer is not more finger-pointing but less, and not “come on church, get it together, chop chop,” but the Lord of life himself, the Prince of Peace, the God of all comfort.

► 1:22:20

And God’s ways being higher is good news, not creepy. He is not like us in a worse way, or a neutral way, but a better way. Jesus reasoned from ordinary fathers who give their children bread: “how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13). “Did you know that God is totally okay with blessing you more than you bless him back? There’s not a secret invoice.” In the room he has prepared for you there is a mint on the pillow – but no bill.

Two pieces of advice

► 1:24:18

First, there is someone to appeal to. Jesus told of a widow who kept going to an unjust judge until he gave her justice, so that we would not give up in prayer (Luke 18:1-8). “Things look awful on TV. Don’t stop praying. There is someone you can appeal to, and it’s not Geno” – someone with real authority, power and peacemaking ability.

► 1:25:27

Second, do not put the weight of the world’s problems on your shoulders, especially if you are the kind of person who always says, “Okay, I can help.” You are one part of a body. A football team where every player tries to play every position “would lose every game, everyone running around in circles with nervous energy.” “You’re not God. God is God, thankfully. I can barely remember where I put my wallet.” He will guide you and give you things to do, and walk with you in the hard ones. “Jesus is the actual desire of the nations. He was then, he still is now... He’s our confident leader, and he’s competent.”

► 1:27:44

Matt prayed for strength to stand faithfully: “Let your kingdom come, let your will be done... take care of us, tend to our needs, forgive our sins, give us peace, to your glory.” Then a member of the church, Jolene, spoke up: to receive what Matt had said, we have to ask whether we really trust God to bring peace in hard times, or whether hurt has left a part of us that does not. She invited people to come forward, “take a leap of faith,” and let the body pray for one another.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- [Matthew 5:9](#)
- [Isaiah 9:6](#)
- [Isaiah 58:3–7](#)
- [Isaiah 58:9–10](#)
- [Luke 18:9–14](#)
- [Isaiah 59:14–16](#)
- [Isaiah 59:17–20](#)
- [Daniel 3:16–18](#)
- [Isaiah 55:1–8](#)
- [Luke 11:13](#)
- [Luke 18:1–8](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt said peacemaking is godly because it creates something that is not there. Where in your life is God asking you to make peace rather than simply point out who is at fault?
2. In Isaiah 58, what is the difference between the appearance of piety and its substance, and where do you see that gap in yourself?
3. Why does God care about the orphan, the widow and the hungry, and how does that motive change the way we serve?
4. What would it look like for you to “take off the savior-of-the-universe hat” and find your actual role?
5. Like the widow before the judge, what situation will you keep bringing to God in prayer this week without giving up?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDcwWco7E2s&t=3090s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.