

Blessed are the Peacemakers

¹ And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. ² Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: ³ “Blessed *are* the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Blessed *are* those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. ⁵ Blessed *are* the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. ⁶ Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled. ⁷ Blessed *are* the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy. ⁸ Blessed *are* the pure in heart, For they shall see God. ⁹ Blessed *are* the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God. ¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:1–12)

Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.

The world is forever holding conferences about peace, about bringing people together. There are people whose full-time jobs are professional negotiators, professional architects of treaties and deals and pacts between nations and businesses. But why does this not work?

According to one statistic, there are somewhere around 50 to 60 armed conflicts going on in the world today, the highest number since World War 2. The Geneva Academy says there are 114. One hundred and 14 wars. So much for the United Nations. With all these peacekeeping missions and forces, why can't we stop fighting? The generation that fought in World War 2 have mostly all died; but their children, and their children's children have begun new wars and new conflicts.

The problem is that war and conflict is not merely a question of politics, disputes over territory and resources. Jesus told us where the problem is in the heart.

²¹ For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts,... murders,...thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, an evil eye, pride, foolishness. (Mark 7:21–22)

James says the same thing in James 4, where he asks this question:

¹ Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not *come* from your *desires* for pleasure that war in your members? ² You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. (James 4:1–2)

Conflict and war can never be solved externally, because the root of conflict is internal. It is a lustful, restless heart, that proudly demands its desires from others.

Now here in the Sermon on the Mount, the beatitudes have been describing someone who comes to salvation. First, he is poor in spirit, and sees his need. That leads him to mourn over his sin in repentance. He accepts he needs to be meek and like a little child to receive this salvation, and he hungers and thirsts for God's righteousness. When he receives it, one of the first changes in him is that he is merciful. He has been forgiven, so he forgives others. The next is that he is pure in heart, having the imputed purity of Christ, and practically pursuing that purity, he now experiences more and more illumination of God. The next effect of this new heart, of this righteousness given to him is that he becomes a peacemaker.

Picture a world where everyone is a peacemaker. Think of how dramatically life would change on every front. Think of what would no longer be needed, of what we could do away with, if everybody did their utmost not to provoke or produce conflict.

But what do we mean by peacemaker? We don't mean someone who is simply calm and easy-going by nature. We don't mean a man-pleaser, a yes-man, who avoids conflict by agreeing with everyone. We don't mean an appeaser, someone who just keeps trying to placate hostile people. Winston Churchill famously said that an appeaser is someone who feeds a crocodile, hoping it will eat him last.

A peacemaker is someone who is internally at peace, and who seeks to create as much peace around him. Internally, it is possible to be like a pack of barking dogs, who go into fits of barking at the slightest provocation. ²¹ *As charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, So is a contentious man to kindle strife.* (Proverbs 26:21) . In other words, the contentious man is a living fuel, a flammable character internally, and the slightest spark sets him off on another crusade of personal vengeance or vindication. Internally, we need the fruit of the Spirit which is peace. Proverbs often describes the contentious woman, who is internally a churning cauldron of hot discontent and resentment. She harangues and complains and murmurs because she lacks peace within.

Externally, the person then seeks to maximise peace. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (Romans 12:18)

Paul acknowledges it won't always be possible, and the whole outcome does not depend entirely on you, but you do your part to contribute to peace around you.

How do we do that?

One way is to speak less.

In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, But he who restrains his lips *is* wise. (Proverbs 10:19)

Whoever guards his mouth and tongue Keeps his soul from troubles. (Proverbs 21:23)

You don't always have to reply, or defend yourself, or set people straight, or correct those who are wrong, or criticise, or pass on what someone else said.

A second way is to learn to absorb and patiently endure. Paul instructs believers to walk worthy of our calling “² with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³ endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:2–3)

Those words: lowliness, gentleness, longsuffering, bearing” all have the quality of being shock-absorbers. You're absorbing the roughness of another, his brashness, her pettiness, his arrogance, her offishness, his rudeness, her manipulativeness, his insensitivity, her unkindness. You're flexing when pushed, not snapping. You're dampening the fire, not letting it burn hotter.

A third way is by overcoming evil with good. Paul says ¹⁹ Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, “*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,*” says the Lord. ²⁰ Therefore “*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.*” ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:19–21)

In other words, instead of increasing the cycle of evil and revenge, break the cycle, by doing the unexpected: doing good to the one who harmed you.

If you are peaceful inwardly, and outwardly you pursue peace with your words, with your meek spirit, and with your kind acts, Jesus says something will be said of you: they shall be called the children of God. He doesn't mean being a peacemaker will earn you the status of children of God. He means when you act this way, it will be obvious to everyone who your Father is, who your

family is. God is the God of peace. He makes war on evil, but it is war that will end. The desired end is a place of peace. Hostile, contentious, ever-quarrelsome people do not paint an accurate picture of God. Those who call Him Father should be those with peace on the inside, bringing and creating peace with those around them.

Blessed are the Persecuted

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:10–12)

The final beatitude is different from the others. The others describe a quality in the blessed ones, this final one describes something that happens to them.

Specifically, it says blessed are you when persecuted for righteousness's sake. Verse 11 elaborates on some of the kinds of persecution: being reviled (which means insulted or slandered) and having all kinds of evil said against us falsely for the sake of Christ. Persecution includes the harming and ruining of your reputation.

But persecution goes beyond verbal attacks. Consider Hebrews 11

³⁵ Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. ³⁹ And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, ⁴⁰ God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. ¹ (Hebrews 11:35–40)

The record of persecution stretches from Cain persecuting Abel through Daniel persecuted by jealous Persians, through Christ and His apostles. And it goes through church history: Christians persecuted by Rome, true believers persecuted by the Roman church, Reformers persecuted by Rome, anabaptists persecuted by Reformers, Puritans persecuted by Anglicans, missionaries persecuted by heathens, and to this day, Christians persecuted in Hindu, Moslem, Catholic, and communist countries.

But we should qualify. It does not merely say, 'blessed are they which are persecuted', but 'blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake'. But let's eliminate what is not persecution. It does not say, 'Blessed are those who are persecuted because they become obnoxious, and difficult to the people around them.' Being over-zealous, being fanatical, being obnoxious is simply being unwise – almost inviting and calling for persecution. There is a kind of Christian testimony that is forever poking the bear, kicking the beehive and daring the unbeliever to come after us. It goes on the offensive against political parties. It takes up social and political causes not directly addressed in Scripture, and challenges the unbelievers to stop them. This is not what the beatitude is commending.

It also doesn't say Blessed are they that are persecuted for being good, or noble, or self-sacrificing. There again, of course, is another vital and, it seems to some people, subtle distinction. You will probably not be persecuted for being good or noble. The world, as a matter of fact, generally praises and admires and loves the good and the noble; it only persecutes the righteous.

So what then is meant by righteousness's sake? Being righteous, practising righteousness, really

means being like the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore they are blessed who are persecuted for being like Him.

We remember the Lord Jesus promising that the servant is not greater than his lord, and if they persecuted the master, they will also persecute the servants. What people really dislike is how Jesus convicted them of their lives, of how His righteousness was of an altogether different standard, of how He proclaimed that He was the only way to the Father.

People like their righteousness to be praised. They like their sin to be downplayed. They don't like to be called sinners in need of grace. They don't like the idea that there is a narrow way, or that Jesus is the only way and they have not believed on Him. This is the righteousness that will get you persecuted.

Jesus said, 'Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you ! for so did their fathers to the false prophets' (Lk. Vi. 26). The perfect Christian, as some see him, is a nice, popular man, who never offends anyone. But in that case, he is not being like Christ. But to be like Christ is to invite persecution. Indeed, Paul said, ¹² "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." (2 Timothy 3:12)

But we remember that this is the beatitudes. It means you are happy, and you bring happiness. You rejoice and are exceedingly glad.

Now what are the reasons given for this blessedness, this joy?

First, it confirms our salvation. "theirs is the kingdom of heaven". This refers both to inheriting the kingdom in the future and also to being a citizen of it even now. If the kingdom is yours, then it means you are child of the king, a true co-heir with Christ. So when you are persecuted, you know you are on the Calvary Road with Christ, God is honouring you with a badge of sonship.

Second, it identifies us with the true representatives of God. for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. To be persecuted for righteousness is to be in good company – to be part of the righteous remnant, the true seed of Messiah, the family of God, that has testified and witnessed to the world, the seed of the serpent, the devil's family.

Third, it fixes our hope away from this life. for great *is* your reward in heaven, When earthly rewards, accolades and praise fade away in persecution, we then turn our hearts upward to God. We know that Heaven is where we will experience family, feasting, acclamation, and praise. Heaven is where we will be commended, where God will praise each of His servants according to 1 Corinthians 4:5. The pain of persecution purifies us of the futile chase for man's praise, for earthly popularity, for worldly fame, for admiration and respect from the unsaved world. Persecution burns that bridge and makes us say, the world behind me, the cross before me, no turning back, no turning back.

Blessed are the persecuted for righteousness's sake. They truly belong to Christ, they are members of an elite line of persecuted prophets, and their real hope and joy is in a place where the praise is not fickle, the friendships are not fading, where the praise is not mere flattery, where the admiration is honest and truly earned: for it is a reflection of Christ – His righteousness.

Nine ways that the gospel comes and shapes a person. Nine paradoxes. To be saved, I must recognise my poverty of spirit, mourn over my sin, come meekly to God, hungering and thirsting for His righteousness, experience his mercy, a new purity, and a peace with God, that will even

endure to the end.