

Persecuted Peacemakers and Promises, Promises

by Dick Woodward

Jesus teaches that those who are persecuted for righteousness will inherit the kingdom of heaven and experience eternal life.

Duration: 20:16

Topics: "Peacemakers"

Description

In this sermon from the Sermon on the Mount, the teacher emphasizes the importance of being peacemakers, even in the face of persecution. The teaching focuses on the attitudes that make individuals the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The Beatitudes are presented as a checklist for testing one's level of spiritual maturity, with each attitude being accompanied by a promise of spiritual prosperity. The sermon encourages listeners to memorize and reflect on these attitudes daily to assess their spiritual state and seek God's guidance.

Transcript

We want to extend to you a warm welcome to our lesson from the Sermon on the Mount in the Mini-Bible College. Jesus told his disciples that his peacemakers will be persecuted. Honestly, that doesn't sound like something that I'd want to do.

But our teacher will help us to understand the awesome teaching that Jesus Christ wanted his disciples to understand and to apply to their lives. So join me now as we listen to another challenging lesson from God's Word. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the peacemakers.

Blessed are those who are persecuted. These are the eight beautiful attitudes taught by Jesus on the mountaintop with which he begins that great teaching in Matthew 5, 6, and 7 that we have come to call the Sermon on the Mount. As we have seen, it's not a sermon, it's a teaching.

He opened his mouth and taught them. We read at the beginning of Matthew 5 and at the end of chapter 7, the people were amazed that his teaching was with authority. This was teaching all the way through.

And this teaching had a purpose. To recruit people who could become solutions and answers to the problems of the people of this world. The multitudes around the Sea of Galilee at the bottom of the mountain have every problem imaginable.

Jesus has withdrawn himself and invited certain ones from among that multitude who are with him, perhaps ministering to that multitude, to join him on a mountaintop overlooking the multitude with all its problems. That is the context in which this teaching was given. That is the setting for this teaching we call the Sermon on the Mount.

The first thing Jesus did to recruit solutions and answers to the problems in the multitude was to talk about attitudes. To teach eight beautiful attitudes which would make people the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and which can still make people today the salt of the earth and the light of the world when the Holy Spirit, by the grace of God, puts these attitudes into our lives. So we'd like to invite you to join us again on the mountaintop as we look at the eight beautiful attitudes at the beginning of this great teaching.

Before we move on from the beatitudes, let us focus upon the eighth beatitude found in Matthew 5, verse 10. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. We said when we looked at the second beatitude, blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted, that the value system of Jesus was very different from our value system.

When we meet someone we have not seen for a long time and we find out that they are in good health and prosperous in every way, their wife is in good health, their family is in good health, their work is going well, they have no problems in the world, then we say, my, my, aren't you a blessed person. But if we met someone we had not seen in ten years and found out that they had lost their wife and perhaps one of their children and that they themselves were not in good health and that they were grieving because their work was not going well, if they had suffered financial reverses, we would likely not say to someone like that, you're really blessed. God is really paying you a compliment.

It says in the scriptures, he knows how much we can bear. Apparently he believes you can bear a whole lot. You are blessed of God.

I am sure he has given you the grace to cope with all that. Would you say that to somebody? We don't usually say that because our value system is not like the value system of Jesus. Jesus said you are spiritually prosperous when you are mourning.

You are in a state of grace when you are mourning. Now he says the same thing. You are in a state of grace.

You are spiritually prosperous. You are being prospered spiritually when you are persecuted because of righteousness and you really know that you are part of the kingdom when you are being persecuted. You will find the values of Christ in the New Testament, not only in the gospels and in the teaching and examples and actions of the Lord, but you will also find them in the epistles written by the apostles.

You will find them throughout church history. Listen to these words written by the apostle Paul to Timothy. Paul is saying in his last words to this young man, who was a son in the faith to him and also a son in the ministry, You know from watching me the kind of person I am.

You know what I believe and the way I live and what I want. You know my faith in Christ and how I have suffered. You know my love for you.

You know how many troubles I have had as a result of my preaching the good news. You know all about those things that were done to me while I was visiting in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. And you also know how the Lord delivered me from it all.

That's in 2 Timothy 3 10-12. And so it is true, yes, and those who decide to please Christ Jesus by living godly lives will suffer at the hands of those who hate him. This is taught not only by Jesus, but it is taught and lived out by the apostles.

If you decide to please Christ Jesus and serve him and preach his gospel, you can expect to suffer for that. Jesus tells us so in his teaching. He says to us in his teaching, When you are reviled and persecuted, lied about because you are my followers, it's wonderful.

Be happy about it. Be very glad for a tremendous reward awaits you up in heaven. Remember the ancient prophets were persecuted too.

Another way to say it would be, beware when all men speak well of you. They have always spoken well of the false prophets, but they will always persecute the true prophets. That's Luke chapter 6 verse 26.

So when you are persecuted and you know it's because of your faith and your preaching, it's because of your identification with Christ. Then rejoice and be glad because you know that you're part of this kingdom and you know that your reward will be great in heaven. In the epistles of Peter at the end of the New Testament, 14 times he makes reference to suffering.

Bible scholars believe that Peter is writing to believers out in the provinces. Persecution has become intense in Rome. He knows that many of these people are already suffering persecution because of their faith and he knows it's going to get worse.

So 14 times in his letters he addresses the subject. Listen to this excerpt from 1 Peter chapter 4 verse 12. Dear friends, don't be bewildered or surprised when you go through fiery trials ahead, for this is no strange, unusual thing that is going to happen to you.

Instead, be really glad because these trials will make you partners with Christ and His suffering and afterwards you will have the wonderful joy of sharing His glory in that coming day when it will be displayed. Be happy if you are cursed and insulted for being a Christian. For when that happens, the Spirit of God will come upon you with great glory.

What Peter was saying was the glory of the Spirit of God is being seen in you when you are going through suffering. Now Peter will also say, Do not let me hear of your suffering for murdering or stealing or making trouble or being a busybody in other people's affairs. But it's no shame to suffer for being a Christian.

Praise God for the privilege of being in Christ's family and being called by His wonderful name. And then he concludes in verse 19, So if you are suffering according to God's will, keep on doing what is right and trust yourself to the God who made you, for He will never fail you. Do you see how strong a teaching this is throughout the New Testament? Suffering was to be expected among the New Testament church people.

Peter tells us other things about suffering. To illustrate one of the reasons why God's people suffer persecution, and it is only one, there are many. Peter says in the opening verse of 1 Peter 4, Since Christ suffered and underwent pain, you must have the same attitude He did.

You must be ready to suffer. For remember, when your body suffers, sin loses its power. You will not be spending the rest of your life chasing after evil desires, but will be anxious to do the will of God when you are suffering.

Sometimes we look at persecution or we look at suffering and the many forms in which it comes into our lives, and we see it as a huge devastating storm. We see it as a horrible thing. It has us terrified.

It has us horrified. Sometimes, Peter says, God uses suffering like that in our lives, whether it is coming from persecution or from other sources, and for other reasons. Suffering can have that effect in our lives.

Maybe that is what He means, and that is what Jesus means, when the teaching is you are in a state of grace when you are being persecuted for righteousness. I love the way Peter put it in 1 Peter 4, verse 14. The glory of the Spirit of God is being seen in you when you are suffering, especially when you are being persecuted.

You see, when we suffer, when we are persecuted, God sometimes will deliver us from the storms of persecution, but sometimes He will give us the grace to cope with the suffering and the persecution. When we are in that place where we are suffering, we are being persecuted and God is giving us the grace to respond to it, God gives us the grace to cope with it. According to Peter, at that moment, the glory of the Spirit of God is being seen in you, or you could put it this way, the Spirit of God will come upon you with great glory, 1 Peter 4, verse 14.

There are many things in the Scripture about persecution, especially based upon the epistles of Peter. Peter says that it is a calling. He says that Jesus set the example, remember? He suffered.

When you follow Jesus, do you think you are only following the crowd? The reality is Jesus is leading people out to bear their crosses. He made that very clear, and when He makes that clear, a lot of people are not interested in following Him. But notice this, it is included in the eight basic attitudes that the people who are going to be a solution and His answers must have.

If you are going to live godly lives in Christ by serving Him and by preaching His gospel, you will suffer persecution at the hands of those who hate Him. Paul says that in 2 Timothy 3, verse 12. I believe it is a given in the New Testament that if you are really going to follow Jesus, you can expect persecution.

There you have them, the eight beautiful attitudes that Jesus said must be in your mindset, in your outlook, in the way you see things, if you are going to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth, part of His solution, part of His answer to what is wrong with people of this world. We said as we began these Beatitudes that these Beatitudes are a checklist for testing your level of spiritual maturity. Well, that is really what they are.

I wonder if you will not give yourself a check up from the neck up by meditating through these eight beautiful attitudes and the promises that go with them. There are actually three parts to each Beatitude. They begin with the word blessed in most translations which could mean happy, spiritually prosperous or I like the expression in the state of grace.

The people who are really in the state of grace and receiving the grace of God into their lives are the people with these attitudes. I would like to challenge you. I would like to exhort you to memorize these eight attitudes and then constantly use them to give yourself a spiritual check up from the neck up.

Every morning when you wake up, ask God, Oh God, am I poor in spirit? Am I grieving over the fact that I am poor in spirit? Do I know that I cannot but do I believe that you can? Am I meek, God? Am I taking your yoke upon my life? Am I going to do things my way today or God's way? God, I hunger to know what your way is so that I might do it. God, make me a channel of your love with a pure heart. Let me be a minister of reconciliation today even if I get persecuted for it.

Those are the attitudes that will make you and me the salt of the earth and the light of the world. I would now like to consider the promises that go with each Beatitude. We said previously that there are three parts to each of the eight attitudes.

They all begin with the word blessed, which could be translated in a state of grace or spiritually prosperous, are the people who have these attitudes. Each one begins with this pronouncement that these are the people who are in a state of grace. God is pouring his grace into people who have these attitudes.

That is the first part of the Beatitudes. The second part is the attitude itself, poor in spirit, mourning, meek, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, persecuted. We have considered all of these.

Then there is the third part to each of these Beatitudes. Each one of them has a promise. I would like now to consider these promises quickly.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. What is the promise given to them? Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven as expressed here is simply God reigning or ruling over the hearts of men.

Jesus taught us to pray in this Sermon on the Mount. A little later on we'll come to it. Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

That's Matthew 6, verse 9-10. What is the kingdom of which Jesus speaks? It is simply another way of saying the rule, the reign, the will of God over the hearts of men. When we pray in the disciples' prayer, thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven, we are saying, God, I want your will to be done in this earthen vessel of mine as it is willed and done in heaven.

When the will of God as it is expressed and as it exists in heaven is realized on earth through men, that is what the kingdom of heaven is. It is a spiritual kingdom. Jesus told Pilate as we saw when we studied the Gospel of John, my kingdom is not of this world.

If it were, my servants would fight. John 18, verse 36. It is a spiritual kingdom and it is in the hearts of men.

When we allow God to plant the white flag of surrender in our hearts and we surrender our lives to him and become subjects in his kingdom, and he is our king and we do his will, then he is our master and we are his subjects in this kingdom of heaven. In the Gospel of Matthew up to chapter 16, Jesus refers to his people as a kingdom. It is in chapter 16 that for the first time he uses the word church.

And so, really, the kingdom of heaven is another expression for church. What is the church? Who are the church, really? Who are these people who have a right to call themselves the church of God or the church of Christ? It is the people who say that he is their Lord. The people who submit to the Lordship of Christ and move through this world with his attitudes, with his values, with his disciplines, expressing who and what he is all about.

There you will find his church. And another way of saying that is there is his kingdom. Those who mourn, we are told, will be comforted.

This is a beautiful word in the scriptures. In the book of Isaiah, for 39 chapters, you have the message of Isaiah telling how God's people are going to have to submit to a spiritual kind of surgery, the Babylonian captivity, the chastisement of God, because of their sin, and especially their sin of idolatry. In these first 39 chapters, you hear about that.

Some scholars call it the spiritual surgery the people of God are going to have to go through. But beginning with chapter 40, the message changes. Isaiah chapter 40 begins with the words, Comfort, comfort ye my people.

Speak ye comfortably to my people and tell them that the war is over. Tell them that they have been sufficiently chastised for their sin, and now God wants to comfort them. A hospital that I used to visit had a plaque over the entrance that said, We dress the wound, God heals it.

Surgeons can make wounds, but only God can heal the wounds that the surgeons make. But when the surgeons are good surgeons, it's a good wound that they make in the bodies of people. Very often the wounds made by the surgeon will save the lives of those people, but after the surgery, there has to be a time of healing.

That is what the book of Isaiah is like. First are the 39 chapters of surgery, and then 26 chapters of healing. And the healing begins with the words, Comfort ye, comfort ye.

We are told in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 that when we hurt, when we suffer, when we go through tribulation, one of the ways God makes that redemptive, one of the ways God gets a lot of good out of our tribulation, trials, and suffering, and hurt, is that while we are hurting, we are forced to find the comfort that can be found in God alone. Once we know that there is comfort to be found in God because we were forced to discover that comfort, when there was nobody to comfort us but God himself, then we become ministers of comfort. As an evangelist is like one beggar telling another beggar where the bread is, ministers of comfort are hurting hearts telling other hearts where their comfort is.

When we mourn, we are comforted. Now the promises and the attitudes in the first two Beatitudes tell us something. Somebody has said, all the other religions of the world can be summed up this way, man is seeking after God, but the Hebrew Christian revelation can be summed up this way, God is seeking after man.

Somebody else has said, the religions of this world tell us that getting to know God, finding God, getting to God is like climbing a ladder. In many religions you climb this ladder throughout many lifetimes and then finally, hopefully, at the top of the last ladder you find God. The Hebrew Christian revelation says, no, no, it's not like that.

There is this ladder, but you don't have to climb that ladder to get to God. God comes down the ladder to you and he finds you at the lowest rung on that ladder and he meets you at the lowest point in your life. Perhaps that is what the first two Beatitudes are telling us with their promises.

The people who are really in the state of grace are the people who are poor in spirit, the people who mourn and grieve, who perhaps even suffer in connection with learning that they are poor in spirit. But these people discover the comfort that is to be found in getting through to God and God getting through to them when they are hurting. And these people are the true church of God.

These people are the true kingdom of God. The promise that goes with meekness is that the meek will inherit the earth. This expression is not just a New Testament expression.

If you trace it through the Bible, you will find it as an Old Testament expression. It is mentioned many times in Psalm 37 and many feel that this quote is taken from that Psalm. To inherit the earth means you get it all.

The big lie that seems to come from the pit of hell is that the Lord is terrible and that if you do his will or you surrender to his will, you are going to live the most terrible life you can imagine. That's a lie. It's a lie from the pit of hell.

The truth is that the Lord is good. His way is perfect. His will is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God for your life.

The big lie is that if you do the will of God, you will somehow live a miserable life and you will miss out on a lot. The truth is that if you submit to God and do his will, you will inherit the earth. Yes, you will have eternal life.

That is really what that expression means. Until next time, be blessed in the name of Jesus. Amen and Amen.

God promises to give you eternal life today if you will trust and follow him. Until we meet again, may you experience God's blessings as you become a doer and not a hearer only of God's word.

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