

Truth for Today

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The Beatitudes in the Modern World: The Blessings of Peace

Introduction

This is the last of the series on The Beatitudes listed in Matthew 5:1-12. We turn today to Matthew 5:9-12: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

We need to remind ourselves that The Gospel of Matthew was written by a Jew, for Jews from a Jewish culture and background, and with the history and destiny of the nation of Israel ever in mind. It clearly has a Jewish flavour.

There are certainly parts which will have a special message for Jews living in Palestine immediately after the Lord Jesus has fulfilled His promise to Christians, "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2-3). That should not reduce in any way the sharpness of the moral challenge of the message to Christians of the present day; we who believe that Jesus died for our sins, and rose again for our justification (Romans 5:1).

First of all, then, let us consider the blessing of peace, contentment and tranquillity.

Peace

Obviously, there is much more to peace than the negative consideration of absence of war, trouble, unrest or disagreement. In a most positive way, true peace is a state of heart in which a person is kept content in every circumstance, indeed irrespective of circumstances. We learn from James 1:17 that God Himself is the source and origin of every good and perfect gift. That would clearly include peace. God is the God of peace. The peace He makes available to us is His own peace, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, totally incomparable (Philippians 4:7).

God sent His Son into the world to make peace by the blood of His cross (see Colossians 1:20). That is, by dying on the Cross of Calvary to bring us into a peace we could never establish for ourselves.

In His life upon earth, the Lord Jesus was absolutely sinless. He lived a perfect life. He always had an inner peace in His soul. At all times, and in every kind of circumstance, He had a deep, innate conviction of total, utter serenity, and a completely clear conscience. He was totally vindicated at all times and in all circumstances in His own personal spirit (1 Timothy 3:16). He knew that in all things He was well pleasing to the Father (John 8:29). In His relationship with His disciples, peace was a characteristic blessing that He brought to them. That which He knew and enjoyed so fully in the experience of His own soul, He desired for them also.

He is now in heaven, His work on earth is completed. He is exalted at the right hand of God (Hebrews 10:12). He is awaiting the day when His glory shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9). He shall appear in power and great glory, bringing His saints with Him (read Matthew 24:1-51 and Jude 14-15). The prophet Isaiah reveals that one of His many deserved titles then shall be that of Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). His Kingdom of universal peace, which He will personally establish and maintain, shall never be superseded by any other.

As to ourselves, we would be foolish to assume that we can live a life of sinless perfection in this world. But, we can live a life characterised by the enjoyment of the peace of God, living in communion with Him, day by day, with the peace of God filling our souls. Yes, that's right. You and me, we who have trusted Christ as our Saviour, who are glad to call Him Lord. What an incentive to seek to please Him now, living in submission and dependence upon Him, in communion with Him, our Lord and Saviour, reading our Bibles, praying every day, striving to be well-pleasing to Him in every aspect of our lives. This is the way we Christians are to live, before the Lord, while we wait for His

Coming. We can have the same inner peace that He had, that same serene contentment, living here in obedience to His written word, in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Himself tells us, "My peace give I unto you." (John 14:27)

Mark well. Once we have trusted Him as our Saviour, and confessed Him, **the** Lord, as **our** Lord, an unbreakable link of union has been forged by God which can never be broken. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). We are ready for heaven while still living on earth, not by works of righteousness that we have done, but because God in His mercy has saved us, once and for all (Titus 3:5).

Remarkable though it might seem, we are as ready for heaven as Christ is as he is, so are we, in this world (1 John 4:17). Not because of any virtue of our own, but because Christ has established a righteous basis for our full acceptance before God. That link of **union** can never be broken. However, what can be disturbed is the very tender, sensitive link of **communion** with our beloved Lord. What joy communion with Him is, that inner joy, that serene contentment that He Himself enjoyed, fully, completely and perfectly, when He was here upon earth.

If we commit sin, that will disturb the peace and joy of our communion with Him. But, thankfully, "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all and every kind of sin" (see 1 John 1:7)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins (1 John 1:9). We shall thus be restored once more to full personal communion with our blessed Lord.

In his very practical Epistle, James tells us in James 3:17-18: "Where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."

He who has the Spirit of God's Son in his heart will become an imitator of his Father in heaven, desiring and promoting peace. Seeking peace, we shall express ourselves with gentleness rather than with violence, and not be hasty to condemn others. The wisdom from above produces the fruit of righteousness, sown in peace by those who seek peace. One marked by this wisdom will make peace and in the peaceful condition that is made, reap the fruits of righteousness.

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew 5:9). In exhibiting the family feature of peace that the Father, as Head of the family, shows to perfection, we are showing ourselves to be what we might call 'chips off the old block', possessing and displaying the same family characteristics as our family head, and therefore worthy of being called 'His children'.

Persecution

So far, so good! But, it is well worth considering that The Sermon on the Mount is intended for the guidance of regenerate persons in an unregenerate world. (Matthew 19:28; Titus 3:5). That is, in simple up to date terms, it gives guidance to believers on the Lord Jesus Christ living in a world that seems full of unbelievers. Major questions to be answered include, "What will be the experience of those who live as subjects of the Kingdom of Christ and follow the steps of its King in a world still antagonistic to Him?" Will the Christ-life be plain sailing, roses all the way, for those who are committed to living such an admirable life-style, perfectly at peace in their own souls, and actively promoting peace wherever and however possible?

The plain answer to the second question is, not at all! Anything but! The Lord plainly said to His disciples, "If you are faithful to me, the world will treat you as it treated me" (see John 15:20), "They hated me without a cause" (John 15:25, Psalm 69:4), "They will do the same to you. But do not be discouraged. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). And again, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." (John 15:18-20).

In former times, the world had never been worthy of such godly people (see Hebrews 11:35-40) but they shall have their compensation when the King comes with His own. Those to whom He spoke personally were not therefore to expect that their loyalty would meet any different or better treatment in an unchanged world.

This brings us to the last item considered in these Beatitudes, that of persecution (Matthew 5:10). Those who have been given peace with God through Christ will have a price to pay if, in fellowship with Him, they seek to promote and maintain peace.

It's possible to suffer as part of God the Father's chastening process of refining and purifying His dear children. Rightly understood, and rightly accepted as such, this can be a rich, spiritual blessing. It is also possible to suffer for wrong-doing. If I do suffer as a busybody, for wrongdoing, or because I am awkward, bad-tempered, unreliable etc. I must not imagine, or pride myself, for a moment that I am suffering as a Christian, or for His Name's sake. I will be suffering because I deserve to. That is not the Christian way.

Consider this! Christ has already suffered for what you deserve. "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body, on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). You are not intended to suffer again, even in a secondary way, for that which Christ has already suffered so intensely for you, on your behalf. Christ having suffered for our wrong-doing, it is shameful for us to persist and continue in and then suffer in one way or another for our own wrong-doing.

These are two important matters, but not on the main agenda today. That still leaves at least three possible aspects of persecution.

1. Persecution for conscience's sake

1 Peter 2:19 tells us: "This is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully." The godly servant, while subject, keeps a good conscience before God by refusing to do evil. If this leads to suffering wrongfully, let the Christian remember that to do well, and suffer for it, and take it patiently, is commendable in the sight of God. If we are to be with Christ in heaven, we are also called to follow His steps on the way to heaven, by acting as He would have acted if He had been in the same circumstance.

2. Persecution for righteousness, or doing well

In this world, strife is prevalent. Satan, the god of this world (see 2 Corinthians 4:4), is the author of confusion and division. The believer does not follow that pattern. Christians are to live in peace, and to be peacemakers. As a pilgrim and a stranger, the Christian does not settle down in the world which rejected Christ. The pursuit of righteousness by the Christian will meet the favour of God, but bring the opposition of the world, which does not want God, nor His Christ, nor any who are like Christ. Read 1 Peter 3:14-4:7.

To suffer for righteousness' sake, and witness a good confession before men, demands a good conscience before God and men. The realisation that God allows the suffering will confirm the peace in the believer's heart. The suffering endured by the Christian might well be subtle and in the spirit and the soul, rather than in the body, but it will be real suffering, nevertheless.

3. Persecution for Christ's sake, for His Name, as a Christian

We are ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). We are His representatives in a foreign, hostile country. We should not be surprised if we are treated as He was treated.

In 1 Peter 4:12-19 we read, "if you are reproached for the Name of Christ, blessed are ye, for let none of you suffer as an evil-doer, but if a man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed ; but let him glorify God on this behalf". Let it be rather a cause for rejoicing since the rewards of the kingdom await them in heaven. A heavenly people will find an abundant recompense for earth's afflictions in the "glory that shall be revealed in them", as Paul wrote in Romans 8:18.

Conclusion

What shall we say, then? What saith the scripture?

Our God is the **God of Peace**. **Christ has made peace** through the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:20). Therefore being justified by faith, **we have peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). **Christ is our peace**, who hath made both (Jew and Gentile) one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace (Ephesians 2:14-15). Christ personally is **The Prince of Peace** (Isaiah 9:6).

So, all in all, is life worth living? In particular, is the Christian life worth living? Indeed it is! We might well be maligned, misunderstood, and misrepresented. Our faith will surely be tested. God honours faith, but we must not be surprised if that faith, and our motives, are fully tested before the blessing comes. But, we may be assured that if we model our lives on that of the Lord Jesus Christ, and are obedient to what He says to us in His precious word, He will give us that inner peace which will enable us to remain faithful to Him, whatever persecution He allows to come upon us. We shall then have a proper platform to promote peace, real peace, spiritual peace.

May God give us the grace to stand fast for Him, with peace in our hearts. If He considers it to be necessary, let us have the grace to endure suffering and persecution, until He comes to take us to be with Himself, to be with Him and like Him for evermore.

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