

Blessed When Reviled and Persecuted?

Thomas Robinson, *Seeing Life Through Jesus' Eyes 14*, April 29, 2012

Matthew 5:9-12

¹ Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them. He said:

³ “**Blessed** are the **poor in spirit**, for **theirs is the kingdom of heaven**.

⁴ **Blessed** are those who **mourn**, for they will be **comforted**.

⁵ **Blessed** are the **meek**, for they **will inherit the earth/land**.

⁶ **Blessed** are those who **hunger and thirst for righteousness**, for they will be **filled**.

⁷ **Blessed** are the **merciful**, for they will be **shown mercy**.

⁸ **Blessed** are the **pure in heart**, for they will **see God**.

⁹ **Blessed** are the **peacemakers**, for they will be called **children (sons) of God**.

¹⁰ **Blessed** are those who are **persecuted** because of **righteousness**,
for **theirs is the kingdom of heaven**.

¹¹ **Blessed** are **you** when people **insult** (revile) **you**, **persecute** you
and falsely **say all kinds of evil** against you because of **me**.

¹² **Rejoice and be glad**, because **great** is your **reward in heaven**,
for in the same way they **persecuted the prophets** who were **before you**.”

Matthew 6:33

³³ “But **seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness**, and all these things will be added to you.”

Matthew 5:20

²⁰ For I tell you, unless your **righteousness** exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never **enter the kingdom of heaven**.

Matthew 5:44-45, 48

⁴⁴ “But I say to you, **Love your enemies** and **pray for those who persecute you**, ⁴⁵ so that you may be **sons of your Father who is in heaven**. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. . . . ⁴⁸ You therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Matthew 10:34-36

³⁴ “**Do not think that I have come to bring** (cast) **peace on the earth**. I have not come to bring (cast) **peace**, but a **sword**. ³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶ And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household.”

Isaiah 9:6-7

⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace**. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and of **peace** there will be no end, on the **throne of David** and over **his kingdom**, to establish it and to uphold it **with justice and with righteousness** from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Isaiah 53:4-5 (cf. Matt. 8:17)

⁴ Surely he has **borne our griefs** and **carried our sorrows**; yet we esteemed him **stricken, smitten by God**, and **afflicted**. ⁵ But he was pierced for **our transgressions**; he was crushed for **our iniquities**; upon him was the chastisement that **brought us peace**, and **with his wounds we are healed**.

Luke 19:41-42

⁴¹ And when he drew near and saw the city (Jerusalem), **he wept over it**, ⁴² saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the **things that make for peace!** But now they are hidden from your eyes.”

John 18:36 (Jesus responding to Pontius Pilate at his trial)

³⁶ Jesus answered, “**My kingdom is not from this world.** If my kingdom were from this world, **my followers would be fighting** to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders.”

Do We Really Want Such Blessings as These?

We have been exploring Jesus’ sermon to understand its power and meaning. It stands at the beginning of his ministry, spoken to disciples and crowds who knew little of where he was going. But in it Jesus is marking out a distinctive path for himself and his followers. He is also working to reshape the minds/hearts/expectations of his disciples so that they can have resources to receive and grasp the events that will mark Jesus’ ministry, from the confrontation with the Temple, to arrest and crucifixion, and even to resurrection.

This is the coming of God’s Kingdom marked by God’s distinctive heart/values that Jesus proclaimed (Mt 4:17; 28:18) and calls his disciples to seek (6:33). Foundation for disciples.

Jesus begins with Blessings (beatitudes, Latin, beatus). But such blessings! Paradoxical, unexpected. Not standards to strive for but descriptions of the people among whom that long expected kingdom and its blessings were breaking in. Not keepers of the Temple; not a pure monastic community; not rigorous Torah observers; not warriors against Rome. As a prophet Jesus is defining both God’s judgment and hope for his people.

The final blessings are challenging because they move from making peace to being persecuted, insulted, and slandered. Jesus’ warns, You may not want to go with me. It is the road to life, to God’s kingdom, but from where you are now, it will seem hard.

Peacemakers and Persecution

We love the idea of a peacemaker, unless they make peace with someone we want to fight.

The struggle is played out in relationships, jobs, professions, ethnic groups, politics.

Jesus says be reconciled, turn the cheek, love your enemies, forgive (5:24, 39, 44, 6:12-15).

How could you not love somebody like that? But Jesus challenged Israel to reject Rome’s violence, to love even the Gentile/oppressor enemy; the law-breaking tax collector. That kind of peacemaking brought opposition, persecution, crucifixion. Cast a sword on earth.

But Jesus did not back down from peace, even in the face of crucifixion. Every kingdom of this world fights for its existence and power. God’s kingdom loves, reconciles, forgives for its existence and power. It is hard, but it is God’s way for God’s children. And it lasts. People will keep using violence to enforce their will (from the personal to the civic to the international level) but it marks those structures as temporary and fatally flawed.

Only God’s kingdom will last, along with what we do/build/create for that kingdom.

Blessed are the Persecuted – Really

Jesus knows how weak love and forgiveness look from a human view. Reviled, slandered.

But God’s love alone is strong enough to break the power of violence and death.

Continued fighting only hardens our broken enslavement to the power of sin.

Jesus in love takes that violence on himself. The Prince of Peace is the Suffering Servant.

He never calls us to seek persecution, but realize that it often comes with living by the new vision of human life he calls us to as disciples. Trust God’s realm; stand with prophets.