

How Can I Be Blessed of God? Part 5

Matthew 5:9-12

As we've been studying the beatitudes, we're discovering that each beatitude chips away at the works-based Pharisaic approach to God being that as long as you look spiritual on the outside you're okay with God; that these are supposedly what qualifies you to enter the Kingdom of God. Jesus however, "*taught with authority, not as the teachers of the law*" (Matt. 7:29). Jesus was saying that to enter the Kingdom of heaven we must admit we are spiritually bankrupt and cannot save ourselves or serve God in our own strength. We must grieve over our sins [admit them and confess them] to receive God's comfort. Since God's assurances make us secure in Him we don't need to retaliate or defend ourselves when wronged but we can leave these things in God's hands since we know the meek will inherit the earth one day. Instead we hunger and thirst for the things of God because only the things of God satisfy us. And we show mercy because we've never forgotten the mercy we've received from God in Jesus Christ. We see glimpses of God's glory and presence through creation and the way He works as we seek to live pure and holy lives.

"Blessed" [joy filled] are we Jesus said when we seek to put God first in every area of our life. But Jesus has two more 'blessings'. Jesus has been moving from our relationship with God [the first 4 blessings; spiritual paupers, grieving over sin, trusting Him and seeking Him] to our relationship with each people [merciful and holy living] and now peacemaking and persecution.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

And we've come full circle again for the reward for persecution is it is proof we are citizens of the kingdom of heaven as is recognizing we lack the spiritual resources to save ourselves. Don't lose sight that we are "blessed", receive God's joy when we follow Jesus' teaching. Jesus was probably alluding to the priestly blessing of Num. 6 when God told Aaron to have the priests always pronounce this blessing over the people at every worship service as a reminder that God wants to bless and protect [keep] His people, He wants to make His face shine on them [in favour listening to their prayers] and be gracious toward them [meeting their needs] and give us His peace; that we experience the wholeness of God, content in who we are, what we have and wish the same for all.

So happy/joy-filled are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God. The reward for being a peace-maker is to be called 'Jesuses', sons of God, because when we seek to bring wholeness into people's lives we are acting like Jesus, whom God is conforming us to be (Rom. 8:28-29).

So how do we become more like Jesus by being a peace-maker?

Initiate Steps to Peace Like God's Son **(5:9)**

Happy, content are those who are peacemakers. The word peacemaker is made of two smaller words. 'Peace' and 'do'. It describes one who is a doer towards peace.

The word for peace to the Jew is shalom. Shalom is not a simple greeting. It means complete, whole and harmony. When one greets another with shalom it is a blessing or an inquiry about how you are doing at wholeness and harmony with God and people. So a peacemaker is one who is one

who works at helping others achieve shalom in their life.

Do not confuse a peacemaker for a peace avoider. A peace avoider is one who avoids confrontation, someone who when faced with conflict or other's conflict, thinks they are a peacemaker by stepping in and saying, 'O let's not fight or argue.' All that usually does is delay or even build up tension toward greater conflict. To be a peacemaker, someone must initiate a gracious confrontation so as to resolve an issue. If there is no resolution and reconciliation there can be no peace that's why avoiding confrontation is not peace.

But before we can make peace between ourselves we must first make sure there is peace . . .

Between God and yourself (Rom. 5:1-2)

True peace comes from God. God is the God of peace. Jesus is the Prince of peace. One cannot truly make peace with another person unless we are first at peace with God. Only God can make us whole, can give us true shalom/peace.

God and Jesus are peace doers. All of us have sinned. All of us come into the world not at peace with God. Sin is the barrier to peace with God. Sin literally means 'to miss the mark'. All have sinned [missed the mark] and fallen short of God's glory [presence]. We can't remove that barrier by ourselves to enter God's presence when we die and experience His presence now in life, so God took the initiative to make available to us that peace by sending His Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross for our sins. When we admit to God we are sinners and believe by faith that Jesus' death on the cross was for our sins, then we can have peace with God.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand... Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more will we be saved from God's wrath through Him . . . We rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. [Rom. 5:1-2, 9, 11]

A true peace maker then is one who has experienced God's peace through Christ and who consistently works at maintaining that peace with Him by living for His glory and purposes. Once we've received God's peace now we are sons of God and in a position where we can help bring peace ...

Between people and ourselves (Matt. 5:43-48)

Who do you need to make peace with? Let's ask that another way; who do you try and avoid? Why? Because there is some sort of tension there (perhaps only on your part sometimes).

Jesus elaborates on this beatitude later in 5:43-48.

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

How do we work at being at peace with people who have hurt us? Jesus gives us 3 simple actions: Love them in Christ, because God loves them. Pray for them – to come to repent or come to know Christ. Greet them. Greet them? Say hi, ask how they are doing or about their family and jobs and concerns. Don't avoid them, because avoidance over time allows the hurt to fester inside us. Contact brings us together. Even a greeting is an opportunity to work towards peace. Peace makers work at making peace possible.

Go to Romans 12:17.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

It may not be possible to be at peace with everyone, but Paul says make sure you are not the reason why there isn't peace. If we understand the context of this passage in vv.9-21 peace will be more easily accomplished when we are not the focus of our life. We are commanded to love others, be devoted to one another, keep our spiritual fervour, share with God's people in need, practise hospitality, bless those who persecute you, live in harmony, do not be proud, do not be conceited, don't repay evil for evil, don't seek revenge and overcome evil with good.

In **Rom. 14-15** Paul acts as a peacemaker by trying to bring together those who disagree on some of the 'grey areas' that the Bible isn't specific on. God does not list every do and don't in the Bible because He wants us to live wisely for His glory and make choices that honour Him and build up the body. But we won't always agree on everything. Sometimes that means refraining from an activity that we can glorify God in, that other believers may wrestle with. Keep peace Paul says by acting in Christlike maturity. V.19 says,

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of . . . whatever the issue might be.

And of course, we need to do all we can to make peace

Between people and God (Rom. 3)

People are lost because their sin separates them from God. Sharing the good news of Christ is to seek to bring peace into people's lives but it is also a form of confrontation. Which is why we have a hard time doing it. We have to graciously explain to people that all of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. That none of us are right before God and that none of us are nice enough or good enough to get in the Kingdom based on our merits. That confronts their upbringing, their religion and their character. But the gospel is God coming to us through Jesus Christ. Since we can't get to Him, he came to us. He came to be one of us, lived a sinless life but was killed for it. Here's the thing; no matter how good and gracious we are at helping people find peace with God it is a form of confrontation and many will not respond positively; at least at first.

What's the beatitude after this:

"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of right-teousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult 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.

Jesus says we can experience God's joy when we seek to initiate peace with people just like Jesus did and when they reject it we . . .

Receive Persecution for Identifying with God's Son **(5:10-12)**

This joy is not some kind of sadistic enjoyment of pain but rather the affirmation of being in God's will and knowing it is evidence that you're in the kingdom.

Persecution affirms we are Kingdom citizens (5:10)

Why else would you identify with Jesus if you didn't know there was eternal reward for enduring verbal and other forms of suffering. We are willing to endure temporal suffering because we are trying to warn the lost of eternal suffering in hell separated from God.

The apostle Peter says suffering for Jesus also assures us of eternal rewards in 1 Pet. 1:3-9,

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

This is as worse as it will get for us, but not for the unsaved. Jesus Himself warned us of this but also reminded us that this . . .

Persecution is against Jesus not you (v.11; John 15:18-25)

⁸ "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. ²¹ They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. ²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. ²⁴ If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. ²⁵ But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.'

The sad part of course is we are trying to be peacemakers, to get people to understand they are not at peace with God, and Jesus comes to make that peace available; but they must choose for themselves by faith to believe it is free and costs us the humbling of our souls and the giving up of our wills, resulting in true and lasting joy.

As well as present comfort and joy-filled peace and future reward there is something else that persecution does for God's people.

Persecution brings us closer (v.12)

Jesus said when we are persecuted for living for Him, we're in pretty good company – the prophets. The prophets brought a message of hope to hopeless people. Some accepted it, many did not. And the prophets suffered for it. When we do the same thing they did – stand up for God's Word in our day and culture – we can identify with each other. We'll turn to other believers. Only we can relate to our own sufferings as Christians. We know what it's like to be rejected by family. We know what it's like to be the only Christian in your work place. We know what it's like to be a Christian in your school or on your team or on the block. It draws us together and it's necessary because we need each other's encouragement when we're suffering for our faith.

In John 16:2, Jesus made a scary statement that seems to apply more today than it did back then. *"A time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a sacrifice to God. They do such things because they do not know the Father or Me. I have told you this so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you."*

Paul said it would get worse in the last days. The closer it gets to Jesus' return for His church, the more depraved man will become. Even today we face persecution when we stand firm on the Bible and

- speak out in love against same-sex marriages
- when we abstain from sex before marriage
- disciple our children
- show compassion to the weak and needy
- don't steal trinkets or time from our employer
- choose to encourage rather than criticize or complain
- even going to church

When we share the gospel we are working at being peacemakers. Gospel means 'good news.' When we get good news we share it with others. We have the good news of the gospel. People can be saved from spending eternity in hell if they put their faith in Jesus who paid for their sins on the cross.

In Rom. 10:15 Paul quotes Is. 52:7 *'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'* to describe us who seek to share the gospel.

In Paul's day news and mail travelled by fast runners, running over mountains and hills. Beautiful are those who bring the message of good news, that promotes peace with God through Jesus Christ. How beautiful are your feet? Have we taken the message ourselves on our mountain, streets, work places, schools, neighbourhoods because people need to find peace with God? If it's called good news then let's share it. We show ourselves to be like Christ when we share the message of peace with the gospel but also peace to deal with conflict.

Who do you need to work at being a peace maker to? Are we holding on to a grudge, a hurt? Are we praying for them, seeking to love them in Christ, and greeting them, not avoiding them? Pray Ps. 139:23-24,

²³ *Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.*

²⁴ *See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.*

Ask God to search your heart for any unconfessed sin especially with splintered relationships. If we are at fault let's be a peacemaker. Let's initiate the path towards peace and show each other

we're one of God's sons who want to bring peace within the family of God and bring others into His family.

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If you have any questions or comments about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net