

Text in Box is for the YouVersion Notes

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The Invitation to Blessed Peace

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Upside Down / Kingdom of God / Matthew 5:10-12

True disciples look through persecution towards their blessed peace.

Real life makes you rewrite sermon introductions. My grandmother passed away on Tuesday night so I've spent the week really meditating on Jesus's words here, knowing I'd preach about heaven on Sunday, which was its own grace in grief.

Ross has done a great job showing about how the Beatitudes are not a formula for blessing. Jesus's words here are not conditional: he is not saying "if you make yourself poor in spirit, then you will be blessed."

Instead, Jesus is flinging wide the doors and emphasizing that the kingdom of heaven is open to the people who don't pretend they have it all together. Why? Because people who pretend they have it all together necessarily deny their need for God. So, it is instead the mourners, the meek, the hungry---those who know their lack---for whom heaven is opened.

Our last section here is a hinge passage which swings us from a general description of the qualities of all to whom heaven is opened and into a section where Jesus addresses the disciples there directly to tell them exactly what marks his true disciples apart.

Today I want us to hear Jesus's invitation: **True disciples look through persecution towards their blessed peace.** I want to show you this by asking three questions of the text?

a. Why is persecution linked with the kingdom of heaven?

- b. Why are we blessed when we are reviled?
- c. And, what is the reward in heaven?

Lets read [Matthew 5:1-12](#) to get it back in front of us.

Matthew 5:1-12 *ESV*

¹ Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

² And 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 satisfied.

⁷ “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive 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 others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

You look through persecution towards peace by recognizing you are a real threat.

By this point, we've read [Matthew 5:1](#) at least three times, but I don't want us to rush over some key details in this verse that help us to make sense of verses 10-12. We are going to zoom out to the 50,000 foot level to see some intertextual connections Matthew is highlight for us.

When you read through the Gospel of Matthew, you'll notice that Matthew under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit highlights six mountains where Jesus shows he is the true king of Israel.

In the Old Testament, mountains are an important place of revelation where the Lord God intervenes to demonstrate who he is. For example, on Mount Moriah, God speaks to Abraham and tells him that he will supply the sacrifice, which he will do so through Jesus. . . on a mountain. . . We see this in [Matthew 27](#) on top of that very same mountain. There are many other important revelatory moments on mountains. Think about the moment with Elijah in [1 Kings 18](#) on top of Mount Carmel where God shows his glory to all present. All present fell on their faces. Again in [Matthew 17](#), we see Jesus Christ transfigured into his heavenly glory on a mountain just opposite Nazareth where Elijah had met the false prophets of Baal. How do the disciples react? They too fall on their faces. These mountains are clues where Matthew is saying: look here. This is important.

But perhaps the most important moment in Israel's history happens when their most important leader climbs a mountain to hear a message. After leading his people through the waters of the Red Sea and the wanderings, Moses the greatest of all of Israel's prophets climbed a mountain in Sinai to hear the Law of God. This moment creates a new nation—the nation Abraham, Issac, and Jacob longed for but did not see.

Matthew shows us Jesus on top of a mountain with some important contrast. After walking through the waters of baptism and the wilderness of temptation, Jesus has climbed upon the mountain. But unlike with Moses, the glory of God is not hidden in clouds but revealed in Christ. Unlike Moses, Jesus is not standing

to hear a message but sitting in a position of authority. But most unlike Moses who shut his mouth, Jesus has opened his mouth.

Jesus's work creates a heavenly kingdom---a real nation of people

This is probably an obvious point, but I think it bears mentioning. The church---what we represent---in a very real sense is the present ruling reign of Christ. As John Webster put it,

When we gather week by week, a company of people who get together to hear some words from a book and to eat and drink at a table, the place where we gather is the place of salvation (Webster, *Christ Our Salvation*, 4).

This is a place where we have set aside zip codes, favorite teams, political allegiances, socio-economic status and said to one another: I pledge allegiance to you. You are my brother. You are my sister. We are in this together.

Jesus's values conflict with earthly kingdoms

We need to say that to one another because Jesus's values often conflict with earthly kingdoms. "Jesus is Lord" is a political statement more than it is a religious statement. This is why so often, totalitarian regimes must do everything within their power to stifle the presence of Christianity in their borders.

In the earliest days of the church, the Roman emperor was worshiped as a God, and this obviously is something early Christians cannot do. Even into the 20th century, the Soviet Union's campaign drove churches underground. By 1987, only 18 of the original 7000 churches throughout the empire still gathered publicly. This is to say nothing about the thousands of Christians who worshiped underground during this period.

And why? Because the world's values fundamentally conflict with the values of the kingdom of heaven.

Notice what the passage does not say: Jesus does not say blessed are the persecuted because they were protesting or because they pursue what they

think are the kingdom's political ends. It says, "Blessed are those persecuted for righteousness' sake."

On the one hand, we might be too quick to say, "Well we aren't really persecuted in the West." This is often to counter those who might say that persecution is untying the Judeo-Christian foundations of America.

On the other hand, we might feel as if we are the only ones serious about embracing the persecution that accompanies a disciple of Jesus Christ. This is often a correction to what might be evaluated as a lukewarm attitude.

I submit to you that both these approaches are erroneous. First, there really are real pressures we face today. Second, God did not only have one prophet in Israel when Elijah lamented his aloneness. He had thousands.

Persecution on account of righteousness is borne by Christians in costly ways. Your devotion to God may be mocked by relatives. Your desire to be holy and obey Scripture may be derided as Pharisaical or legalistic. You may be called a "prude," "self-righteous," mocked as "high-and-mighty."

This is a basic principle of the New Testament: the Christian lives in the world, and the degree to which they live a truth-speaking life is the degree to which they are rejected by the world.

You look through persecution towards peace when reviled because Jesus himself was reviled.

The soon-coming command to turn the other cheek only makes sense if you have a high view of your union with Christ, and this ninth beatitude highlights the personal identification Jesus has with his disciples.

Details in texts matter, and here we move from a general third person “blessed is the potential person” to a very personal, “Blessed are you.”

Ross highlighted the uniqueness of the word here, blessed, and I want to turn the prism slightly and show you another facet of this word which help us understand why the persecuted are called blessed.

There are two words in the Bible which can be translated as blessed, and there are slight subtitles which I think highlight our position in Christ.

To avoid confusion, I want to help you with a fairly technical rhyme common on Instagram in 2017: *too blessed to be stressed*.

The person who says this means that he or she has recieved so much that their hands are too full to be stressed. When the Bible uses this word, we are usually pouring all that we have on the feet of Jesus to show him how valuable he is to us---[Eph. 1:3](#) “3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,” That is, we pour everything out back onto God because he has already poured out everything onto us.

Our word here, like Ross has highlighted is something like “blessings on,” or to carry the rhyme forward just a bit, “not stressed because resting as blessed.” That is, this person here, has build their life upon the solid rock to the extend that when the rain comes it does not baffle them. This person who is blessed is already experiencing their share of salvation.

You see, Jesus here indicates that the persecution which assault his people isn’t only the sword---it also looks like slander. And Jesus here indicates that if they slandered him, they will slander you.

How did they slander Jesus? They called his righteousness wickedness. They said he drives out demons by the power of demons. And about you they will say that you act righteously out of self-righteousness.

You can look through that persecution however towards peace because it shows that you are like Jesus. Elsewhere Jesus will say, “No servant is greater than his master; if they hated me, they will hate you.”

You look through persecution towards peace because you rest here and then in the presence of the triune God.

You know a person who has already died does not fear the sword which can kill, and if you are in Christ, you have died to the former things and been raised to new things. The gospel turns all of this world's values on its head.

Why else would Jesus say to "Rejoice and be glad"? Is that something we are to muster up and shoulder out? Absolutely not. Jesus is indicating that the persecution you face is a badge of honor---a red badge of courage.

The Sermon on the Mount exposes all of the attitudes of the old man: when we are hit, we want to hit back. When someone forces us to do something, we want to rebel. When we someone acts as an enemy, we want to fight them like an enemy.

These patterns go back to the garden where we snatch for ourselves something which was not our own. To fix it, Jesus had to give up all that was his and take onto his back something that was not his own---our cross. The Christian way does not first seek what is our right. It seeks for the other their own best, something beyond even a right.

And if you're thinking well that is weakness, I'd encourage you to see that is one of the strongest complaints which nineteenth century philosophers made against Christianity. Friedrich Nietzsche thought Christianity made society weak since it keeps men from fighting for their rights. On the contrary, Christians stand for a kingdom not of this world. Engaging this world with the gospel is done less with swords and more with service.

Now, I don't want my children fed by pagans to the lions any more than any of you do, which is what they used to do to us. There are verses about resistance, but let's sit in what Jesus is exposing in our hearts.

You see here, Jesus is holding out this third way: when people revile you on account of Jesus's sake, you show yourself to already be in the kingdom. When

people despise your values or mock them, you are showing that you are in the world but not of it.

And you know what the Bible calls the place where we don't have to strive for future peace? The kingdom of heaven. That's what this place is. It's this weekly gathering where we read and remind one another of a word done for us, which we need only receive. We're gathering to sing our praises to God yes, but also to sing and remind one another that God's ruling reign is here now too. We have that now, and it's the foretaste of the life to come.

Are you able to look through persecution to see the peace of your now and future kingdom? If not, will you die to the pretense that you can bring the kingdom of heaven by the sword? Lay it down, and rejoice and be glad when they persecute you, because they persecuted the prophets who were before you...and they will persecute the accountants among you, the engineers among you, the teachers, the service workers, the pastors, the stay at home moms all who are being persecuted for righteousness sake. Blessed are you for yours is the kingdom of heaven, already.