

# “Kingdom Come”

## Sermon on the Mount Series: Eight Lesson

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 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 5:10–12 NIV11)

## Introduction

- First, it's interesting that this follows the beatitude about peacemaking. Perhaps this is to remind us that our efforts will often not be appreciated.
- The first and final beatitudes promise the kingdom as a reward. They bookend the other beatitudes and remind us that this is all about the kingdom.
- This issue is so important that Jesus now expands on this issue when he did for any of the others.
- This beatitude serves as a test for all the beatitudes - like the first one. The implication is that if there is no persecution, there is no righteousness.

## 1. Persecuted because of righteousness

### A. Defining the idea

- It is not
  - Persecution due to obnoxiousness! See, **1 Peter 3:14–17**, **1 Peter 4:15–16**.
  - Persecution that's the result of folly, lack of wisdom, over-zealous behaviour, self-righteousness etc. should not be justified by use of this verse.
  - ‘Righteousness’ is not the same as being ‘good’ or ‘noble’. The world does not usually persecute the good and noble, because they feel that they would like to be like them and/or could be like them.
  - The world persecutes the righteous person because they *do not want* to be like them and/or sense they cannot be like them.
  - Not only from the world. Christians can be persecutors of one another: **2 Cor 11:26**, **Gal 2:4**.
- It is
  - The authentic cause of persecution is righteousness.<sup>12</sup>
  - Try fully living the beatitudes and see what happens! Let alone the rest of the Sermon on the Mount.
  - Persecution comes because those who follow Jesus are determined to live as he lived.
  - Caused by following Jesus and Christlikeness: **John 15:18–20**
    - If we live his manifesto it will get us in trouble.
    - Relating to the unjustly treated with justice (key aspect of ‘righteousness’) always stirs up trouble.

### B. Providing Biblical examples

- OT: one could reference any number of the prophets
- NT: Paul, **2 Tim 3:12-13**, **1 Thess 3.4** (See any number of examples from his life in the book of Acts).
- Jesus: He understood that his message was divisive - **Matt 10:34**.
  - He was persecuted and murdered for his message. We should expect nothing less.
  - Note change from “those” (v10) to “you” (plural, v11-12) making it more personal.

<sup>1</sup> ‘dikaiosyneō’: fair and equitable dealing, justice, Acts 17:31; Heb. 11:33; Rom. 9:28; integrity, virtue, Lk. 1:75; Eph. 5:9; in NT generosity, alms, 2 Cor. 9:10, v.r.; Mt. 6:1; piety, godliness, Rom. 6:13; investiture with the attribute of righteousness, acceptance as righteous, justification, Rom. 4:11; 10:4, et al. freq.; a provision or mean for justification, Rom. 1:17; 2 Cor. 3:9; an instance of justification, 2 Cor. 5:21 ~ innocence; justice; justification; righteous, righteousness. MOUNCE Greek Dictionary

<sup>2</sup> Biblical righteousness in its essence is the character, behaviour and status appropriate to the covenant relationship God formed with the world through Israel. Now seen in our relationship with Jesus. It also implies the kind of behaviour consistent with a God who is all about putting wrongs right - whether social injustice or spiritual ‘injustice’ (humanity imprisoned by sin).

## 2. What it means to rejoice

### A. Defining rejoice

- It is not
  - Some perverted masochistic delight in suffering!
  - Our rejoicing is not because we are glad to be persecuted (that would lead to or signify self-righteousness), but because we know we have an identity connected with that of the prophets and Jesus himself.
- It is
  - Acknowledging and rejoicing that we are counted worthy: **Acts 5:40–44**
    - The focus is God, not us
  - Rejoicing because our faith is being purified:
    - **1 Peter 1:6–7**
  - But mostly because our reward is assured:
    - “kingdom of heaven” is ours - now and future
    - **2 Corinthians 4:17–18**
  - Persecution, in the right sense, is a badge of honour.

### B. Providing Biblical examples

- **Acts 16** - Paul and Silas in prison. One could base the entire sermon around this passage. Persecuted because of righteous behaviour, unjustly punished (flogging), yet rejoicing, God acts, many are saved, God is glorified.
- Jesus: **Heb 12.2**

## 3. How these truths affect the way we live

### A. The unhealthy attitudes towards persecution to avoid

- Do not avoid it, **Lk 6.26**
- Do not cultivate it

### B. The healthy attitude towards persecution to cultivate

- Recognise it as a symbol of righteousness
- Accept it as an inevitability (no anxiety)
- Something Jesus experienced (part of discipleship)

### C. The difference it makes knowing we have the kingdom and a reward in heaven

- Some reward comes now - some reward later

## Conclusion

Conclusion to the beatitudes:

- The first four see the godly person on their knees in humility before God. As a result they are close to the heart of God. This being the case they are changed in their dealing with others.
- The second four see the godly person as a citizen of the kingdom transformed in relations with the other members of the kingdom and those beyond its borders.
- These qualities are seen as 'soft' by the sceptical and worldly-minded, but they are anything but. Their practice is the toughest thing to which a man or woman can commit him or herself.
- This is not, however, a checklist of things necessary to enter the kingdom, but a description of the attitudes necessary to inhabit the kingdom. This takes a heart and mind change (repentance). “Thielicke puts it, 'Anybody who enters into fellowship with Jesus must undergo a transvaluation of values.'”
- Christians are able to rejoice and mourn at the same time. “They see that for all the jollity on board, the ship is beginning to sink.”
- The prophets had no earthly reward and only a dim eternal reward yet obeyed God to point of death.