

Refuge City Church — March 3, 2024
Gospel of Matthew: “Peace & Persecution” (Matthew 5:9-12)

Introduction

- As we come to the end of Jesus’ teaching on the Beatitudes, I pray it’s becoming more and more clear who we ought to *BE* in the kingdom of God.
- If we don’t understand who we are because of who created us, and what He has blessed us with, how are we going to be able to address the issues of life??
 - Jesus begins His sermon this way, so we can have a better understanding of how we address things like anger, lust, divorce, commitments we make, disagreements, how we give, pray, and fast, our anxiety and fears, and the list goes on!
- Yet, when we truly live as we should, according to the grace of God, we become a target to the world around us.

[verse 9] “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons [children] of God.”

- Last week we ended with the encouragement that in order to truly be merciful and pure in heart, we ought to look to Jesus as our example... Jesus is our Prince of Peace [Isaiah 9:7]
 - Likewise, our character should be one of peace.
- We serve a God of peace who grants us peace so that we can go and do likewise.
 - **Romans 16:20**, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”
 - That daily war we fight will eventually come to a close, and we will have peace.
 - But it’s by God’s grace [favor] that enables us to carry on.
 - **Ephesians 2:14**, “For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.”
 - He is peace and calms our anxiety by not having to abide by the law in order to receive salvation... imagine the chaos of spirit we would have?
 - He also tears down the wall of hostility between race, culture, social-class status, et al. So that we can view humanity with the same eyes of peace and love.
 - **Philippians 4:8-9**, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”
 - Pursuing righteousness, obedience, and keeping our eyes fixed on our God above, He will bless us with peace... which is His very presence.
 - His presence empowers us in our pursuit of holiness.
- Peace does not come merely by physical proximity to Jesus.
 - Judas was near Him for close to three years!
 - The disciples were with Him in the boat when the storm broke out.
 - Martha was in the house with Him, and was still filled with anxiety and frustration.
- Peace is going to come with proximity of heart.

- Believing and receiving what He has for you.
 - **1 Thessalonians 5:23**, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- What is it to be a *peacemaker*?
- May I suggest we consider how our actions may stoke the fires of chaos, trouble, conflict, unrest, strife, and contention.
 - The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy [John 10:10]. He revels in this kind of action.
- I. Our words!
- **James 3:2, 5b-10**, “For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body... So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.”
 - You know how to disrespect, degrade, and discourage others...to their face and behind their back! It’s not something we need to be taught. [sinful nature]
 - Yet you also know how to diffuse a situation with your words. Are you willing to step forward and be the one to bring peace into the situation?
 - Make peace by not making waves by what we say [be self-controlled].
 - **James 1:19**, “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.”
 - Sometimes, knowing when to *not* speak, keeps the peace.
 - When we encourage each other, we promote peace.
2. Our actions!
- **James 4:1-2**, “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.”
 - Our human nature is to scheme, react on emotion, get revenge, stir the pot, rock the boat... We are people of action, without wisdom.
 - **James 3:13 [16]**, “Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom [gentle, humble & self-controlled]... For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.”
 - With the Spirit of peace, walk in peace, and therefore go out of your way to make peace.
 - **Romans 12:20-21**, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”
 - **Hebrews 12:14**, “Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”
- “For you shall be called sons and daughters of God.”

- **QUOTE:** “It is the devil who is a troublemaker; it is God who loves reconciliation and who now through his children, as formerly through his only begotten Son, is bent on making peace.” [John Stott]
- It is the family business to be at peace and make peace.
- Everyone of us was considered the “black sheep of the family” until God sent His Son, the Good Shepherd, to chase us down and bring us back in to the family.
- That’s reconciliation, and we have the honor and blessing to do so for others.
- Go and make peace.

[verses 10-12] “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

- Whereas sin is defined as “missing the mark” of holiness, when we pursue the perfect holiness of Christ, we become a target for the enemy of this world.
 - This is why the “shield of faith” is so crucial knowing the flaming darts of the enemy will come our way.
- Whereas all the other beatitudes were *internal* characteristics of holiness that should be apparent to others, this beatitude is the reaction of the hard-hearted towards us.
 - It is this beatitude that will test your faith and perseverance to continue to pursue righteousness.
 - Are you willing to accept whatever may come your way?
 - **2 Timothy 3:12**, “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”
- In what ways can that persecution come? Reviling [mocking]. Evil utterances [lies]
 - We immediately think of physical persecution. Given the nature of our culture, it could happen.
 - But what *will* happen is what Jesus mentions here [verbal abuse]
- **REMEMBER:** As difficult as this is when it happens, Jesus is with you.
 - He provides us with everything we need to live the life He has called us [refer to verses 3-9]
 - The world honors those who are prideful, indifferent towards sin, aggressive in their pursuit of wealth and status, are not compassionate or forgiving [signs of weakness], who’s immorality is deemed adventurous and daring, and will fight/battle to attain what every they desire.
 - So when we pursue the very opposite of what the world says is “right living”, we will be attacked for our faith.
 - We will be scorned as going against the tide of culture.
- **1 Peter 4:12-14**, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”

- Do words hurt? Of course. They can pierce right to the heart. How people speak about you can ruin your day.
 - But let us focus on the words of our Savior:
 - Supreme happiness to those who are persecuted. Supreme happiness when you're mocked and made fun of. There is rejoicing and gladness in all this because of two things...
 - We are in the company of Jesus.
 - As we started with [vs. 3], to us belongs the kingdom of heaven.
 - This is not an eternal suffering. It will end, and we will receive unending blessings in glory.
- **Hebrews 12:1-2**, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."