



THE **BLESSED** BATTLE

HAPPY ARE THE MISTREATED

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. 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.”

THE BEATITUDES OF JESUS

“Especially among Christians in positions of great wealth and power, the idea of reading the Gospels and keeping Jesus's commandments as stated therein has been replaced by a curious process of logic. According to this process, people first declare themselves to be followers of Christ, and then they assume that whatever they say or do merits the adjective ‘Christian.’ ...One cannot be aware both of the history of Christian war and of the contents of the Gospels without feeling that something is amiss. One may feel that, in the name of honesty, Christians ought either to quit fighting or quit calling themselves Christians.”

WENDELL BERRY, BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

“We are part of broken structures and systems in which institutions are set up to protect the interests of the powerful while others are excluded and oppressed. If you haven’t experienced much suffering for doing right, it may be because you’ve been on the side of power. Love compels us to speak up, to act in the interests of those without power, to meet oppression with creative resistance. When we do this, we join the cosmic struggle between good and evil. We embrace the possibility of suffering as a necessary and inevitable part of living in a divided world. When we choose to love our enemies and bless those who curse us, we cast our vote for goodness and love, and in the end love will win.”

MARK SCANDRETTE, THE NINEFOLD PATH OF JESUS

“No.”

“Yes, and...”

“Yes, but...”

IS CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION REAL?

Jesus: “Yes, therefore...”

IS CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION REAL?

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

MATTHEW 5:10, NIV

“Most in the Western world believe that the pursuit of happiness is a right. But something has changed: more and more we think being happy is our right. This leads to the question of what happiness means. Here one might toss in a hundred or so quotes, but eventually we will agree that ‘happiness’ is about inner contentedness and material flourishing. That is, many today think it is a right not only to have life but to have a good life. ...The happiness of the Beatitudes is not about feeling good but about

SCOT MCKNIGHT, SERMON ON THE MOUNT

happiness of the Beatitudes is not about feeling good but about being good, and being good is defined by Jesus and shaped by one's relationship with God through him. Being blessed by Jesus may have nothing to do with one's observable condition in life and everything to do with whether one loves God, loves self, and loves others as the self. That, along with the behaviors that emerge out of that kind of love, makes one blessed."

SCOT MCKNIGHT, SERMON ON THE MOUNT

“It does not say, ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted because they are objectionable.’ It does not say, ‘Blessed are those who are having a hard time in their Christian life because they are being difficult.’ It does not say, ‘Blessed are those who are being persecuted as Christians because they are seriously lacking in wisdom and are really foolish and unwise in what they regard as being their testimony.’ ...So often one has known Christian people who are suffering mild persecution entirely because of their own folly, because of something either in themselves or in what they are doing. But the promise does not apply to such people. It is for righteousness' sake. ...We are often so foolish in these matters. We

MARTYN LLOYD-JONES, STUDIES IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

are slow to realize the difference between prejudice and principle; and we are so slow to understand the difference between being offensive, in a natural sense, because of our particular make-up and temperament, and causing offense because we are righteous. ...Let me now add another negative from a different category. This text surely does not even mean 'blessed are they that are persecuted for a cause'. This is a little subtle and we must be careful. I say that there is a difference between being persecuted for righteousness' sake and being persecuted for a cause. ...I am not saying that a man should not stand for his political principles; I am simply reminding you that the promise

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attached to this Beatitude does not apply to that. If you choose to suffer politically, go on and do so. But do not have a grudge against God if you find that this Beatitude, this promise, is not verified in your life. The Beatitude and the promise refer specifically to suffering for righteousness' sake. May God give us grace and wisdom and understanding to discriminate between our political prejudices and our spiritual principles.”

MARTYN LLOYD-JONES, STUDIES IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

It forms our character in the way of Jesus

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW PERSECUTION?

**“Jesus took in hatred, held it, transformed it, and gave back love;
he took in bitterness, held it, transformed it, and gave back
graciousness; he took in curses, held them, transformed them, and
gave back blessings; and he took in murder, held it, transformed it,
and gave back forgiveness.”**

RONALD ROLHEISER, SACRED FIRE

We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. ...For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

It forms our character in the way of Jesus

It invites people into a counter kingdom of love

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW PERSECUTION?

“As every reader knows, the Gospels are overwhelmingly concerned with the conduct of human life, of life in the human commonwealth. In the Sermon on the Mount and in other places Jesus is asking his followers to see that the way to more abundant life is the way of love. We are to love one another, and this love is to be more comprehensive than our love for family and friends and tribe and nation. We are to love our neighbors though they may be strangers to us. We are to love our enemies. And this is to be a practical love; it is to be practiced, here and now. Love evidently is

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not just a feeling but is indistinguishable from the willingness to help, to be useful to one another. The way of love is indistinguishable, moreover, from the way of freedom. We don't need much imagination to imagine that to be free of hatred, of enmity, of the endless and hopeless effort to oppose violence with violence, would be to have life more abundantly. To be free of the insane rationalizations for our desire to kill one another—that surely would be to have life more abundantly.”

WENDELL BERRY, BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

“At first I did fight back. I made some of them sorry that they had attacked me. But then I realized that by fighting back I wasn’t getting anywhere. The hatred coming at me in those fists and clubs was bouncing right off me back into the air, and it could just continue to spread like electricity. I decided not to fight back. I would let my body absorb that hatred, so that some of it would die in my body and not bounce back into the world. I now see that my job in the midst of evil is to make my body a grave for hate.”

JEROME KODELL, CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST

What is your natural reaction towards mistreatment? How can you embrace a non-violent reaction when it occurs?

NEXT STEP