

2022.11.13 - The Blessed Battle - Happy Are The Mistreated Pt 2

So What? Jesus warns us that the people who know the best can also treat us the worst.

Feel What? Peaceful

Now What? In what ways does anxiety block your ability to respond well? How can you become a non-anxious presence to love others well?

READING

Hello and welcome. If I haven't met you yet, my name is Josh and I'm one of the pastors here. We're continuing our message series called "The Blessed Battle" where we're studying what are known as the Beatitudes. We thought it would be a good practice to read them together as a church community. Henry Bartel will read them for us this week.

Reader: From the fifth chapter in the Gospel of Matthew:

"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."

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thank you, Henry.

INTRODUCTION

We talked at length last week about the theme we'll continue on today, persecution and mistreatment. Jesus says blessed, or happy, are you when you're mistreated for thee

sake of the kingdom of God. Don't be surprised, and don't resist it and fight back with the same vitriol.

But not everyone sees it this way. It might surprise you to know that not every Christian agrees about how we should respond to mistreatment, specifically when we're targeted because of our faith in Jesus. Aaron Renn is one such person, who speaks for the many who are reading the trends of the times and thinks we should adapt our approach on how to engage with others.

- **Positive World (Pre-1994): Society at large retains a mostly positive view of Christianity. To be known as a good, churchgoing man remains part of being an upstanding citizen. Publicly being a Christian is a status-enhancer. Christian moral norms are the basic moral norms of society and violating them can bring negative consequences.**
- **Neutral World (1994–2014): Society takes a neutral stance toward Christianity. Christianity no longer has privileged status but is not disfavored. Being publicly known as a Christian has neither a positive nor a negative impact on one's social status. Christianity is a valid option within a pluralistic public square. Christian moral norms retain some residual effect.**
- **Negative World (2014–Present): Society has come to have a negative view of Christianity. Being known as a Christian is a social negative, particularly in the elite domains of society. Christian morality is expressly repudiated and seen as a threat to the public good and the new public moral order. Subscribing to Christian moral views or violating the secular moral order brings negative consequences.**

I think we can see there's a helpful schema to think through our relationship to culture, even if we don't totally accept the framing. For instance, the years seem a bit arbitrary, and I'm not sure that everyone's faith expression was well-received in the so-called Positive World—just ask the Black church during the Civil Rights era. Renn's point is that we now have arrived at a crossroads where faith in the public square has taken on a dubious role where new tactics are called for the engage with people who disagree with Christian principals and who are hostile to the Christian faith.

One of the paths forward Renn and others see is a Benedict Option, which articulates the pulling away from society to build self-sustaining communities of faith not reliant on outside money and support. Another, in quite the opposite fashion, is a hard-hitting

adversarial posture seen by modern self-described Christian Nationalists who want to see the government taken over by people with conservative Christian values who will legislate their views of biblical morality.

But does the changing culture deserve a changing tactic? Does our world deserve a pointed polemic in the name of Jesus? Or do we steal away to our own bubbles, leaving this world to burn on its own terms?

Because, as we saw last week, it doesn't seem to be Jesus' posture to have us avoid mistreatment, religious discrimination, and even persecution. Jesus expects all these things to happen in our lives as we follow him. He expects that there will be a collision of value systems as the kingdom of God crashes in on the systems of this world that produce hatred and evil.

Mark Scandrette, *The Ninefold Path of Jesus*: “Jesus suggests that particular difficulties will come to those who follow his way of life: a way of trust, lament, humility, justice, compassion, right motive, peacemaking, and surrender. If we had to summarize the path he lived and taught, we could say it was a way of radical love. If we follow love far enough, we will be misunderstood, made fun of, falsely accused, and mistreated. Radical love might cost you your life—as it cost Jesus his life.”

And, as we saw last week, in the midst of all this, Jesus even extends a blessing to those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.

Transition: But he doesn't end there. He continues to elaborate on this blessing.

SOLUTION

Matthew 5:11-12, NIV: “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.”

Jesus is anticipating mistreatment here not as an abstract concept, but if it came from unexpected sources. What if it were actually the people around you—those you worked with, lived with, got your daily latte from—were the ones who mistreated you the most? It's as if he is preparing us to not be surprised by in. But not in a cynical way, in a way that helps us process the hurt, the letdown, and all that pain, so we could be ready to give something better back to them in return.

And he connects the idea of a heavenly reward for enduring all these things and that it's possible to actually rejoice in the middle of mistreatment.

Scot McKnight, *Sermon On The Mount*: “The notion here is that one’s eternal/kingdom state correlates with one’s response to God in the present life. This isn’t works righteousness but instead the moral call to responsibility in light of eternal correlation. Jesus later teaches that the disciple’s reward far outstrips the correlation. Blended together, the ‘persecuted’ are those who seek God’s will in spite of what others want, who love God so much they are faithful to God when oppressed, and who follow Jesus so unreservedly they suffer for him. Inherent in persecution, then, are both a love of God and a denial of self.”

This kind of mistreatment isn’t new for God’s people. In fact, we have a Hall of Faith in Scripture that magnifies the deeds of the faithful, who followed Jesus to the end.

Hebrews 11:13-16, 35-38 NIV: All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. ... There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them.

Mark Scandrette, *The Ninefold Path of Jesus*: “Radical love invites us to endure, to keep on doing good, whatever the cost, to believe that right action is more important than any opposition we may face. ...When you have something worth dying for that means more to you than any resistance or persecution you might face—that’s something to rejoice about. In each moment that we seek radical love, we join the lineage of those who have gone before us, who have lived from the hope that love is greater than fear, and that death is not final.”

Transition: What does it take to walk in this way of radical love?

APPLICATION

Two things are necessary: To grow and become emotionally healthy people and to be better equipped to speak publicly about our faith in ways that invite peace.

Arbinger Institute, The Anatomy Of Peace: “If we are going to find lasting solutions to difficult conflicts or external wars we find ourselves in, we first need to find our way out of the internal wars that are poisoning our thoughts, feelings, and attitudes toward others. If we can't put an end to the violence within us, there is no hope for putting an end to the violence without.”

Edwin Friedman was a family therapist, leadership consultant, and an ordained rabbi. He applied family systems theory to leadership situations like churches and even the nation. Friedman challenged the notion of cultural progress that says our nation is headed ever towards a unified utopia. He said that when you look at the data, we've been progressing economically, technologically, and so on, but we're actually regressing as a whole both emotionally and relationally. When we look at things through his lens, we see how fragile our world really is. Friedman, in his book *A Failure of Nerve*, articulated 5 Aspects of an Anxious Culture that we can see develop into a self-perpetuating cycle:

1. **Reactivity** - The cycle is spun up in a culture where people are constantly reacting to the events of life around them without mindful reasoning and self-restraint. It's the constant stream of anxiety expressed through anger, outrage, offense, and vitriol towards others. Sometimes this is couched in social justice language, when it's really a way for media advertisers to make money as our hits, likes, and shares drive up their revenue.
2. **Herd**ing - The instinct to follow the crowd as it devolves on an emotional level into a mob mentality. We see this in cancel culture where someone's misstep provokes backlash by the masses and they're shunned and blackballed forever. Remember the feeling when you saw crowds rush to the store to buy toilet paper?
3. **Blame Displacement** - We focus on the forces that we feel victimized by, rather than looking under the hood of our own soul to see what is causing anxiety in us. It's a posture where we give power over to other people and situations instead of taking responsibility for our own emotions. We, and the systems we inhabit, are paralyzed and we're inhibited from finding proactive solutions.

4. **Quick-Fix Mentality** - Because there's a low tolerance for pain and resilience, solutions are shallow and temporary instead of searching and incisive. It's a bandaid solution that doesn't last. Because of our on-demand, two-day shipping culture, we are geared to seek out the quick-fix.
5. **Lack of Well-Differentiated Leadership** - Psychologists use this term to describe someone who is aware of their boundaries between themselves and others. He or she understands that another person's emotional state doesn't need to dictate their own emotional state. In a cycle of anxiety like I described, an environment is created that works against healthy leaders who can bring needed change.

Friedman described how to break this cycle, which required the insertion of what he called a **“non-anxious presence.”** He describes it as those individuals who are able to navigate tense situations by differentiating themselves from the emotion of the problem and providing input that is decisive, kind, wise, and calm to plot a way forward. It's the kind of leadership Jesus modeled and welcomes us into, and the kind of people that our world needs right now. Through Jesus, we have been invited to step into our workplaces, homes, and neighborhoods to serve as a non-anxious presence and break the vicious cycle of fear.

Ronald Rolheiser, *Sacred Fire*: “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.”

Next, after we establish the need to become a non-anxious presence, we must look at how to engage people, especially those who disagree with us. Tim Keller has written an article on how Christians are to speak in public. In it, he says we must have three things:

1. **Affection: A spirit of humility and love. The fruit of the Spirit includes love, joy and peace, patience and kindness, and humility. These must be evident as we speak about the gospel publicly. Right now, the most popular public figures show confidence and fearlessness but not love and humility. We cannot follow in that train.**
2. **Persuasion: Culturally compelling arguments. Acts and Paul's epistles give us many examples of how Paul argued. He did not merely proclaim truth**

propositions—he showed the particular audience on their own terms why they should believe it. So we should not merely tell people the truth, but look for persuasive ways of reasoning with people’s minds and hearts.

3. **Resolution:** A quiet, courageous confidence in the truth of God’s Word. It will not do if audiences see Christians being hesitant to affirm anything that the Bible teaches. Even if you disagree with a person’s beliefs, the strength and integrity of their belief can command admiration if they are visible.

Transition: I know this brings us some questions for us.

OBJECTIONS

Does this mean we never fight back? Should we not make our voices heard in politics and in the courts? Yes! Yes, of course, but monitor your heart. What does it do when your point of view isn’t heard? What happens when an abortion referendum fails? What happens when a court decision gets struck down? Does you feel angry? Is it because of fear due to a loss of rights? That. That is what Jesus is trying to get a hold of and bring into the light.

Now, don’t get me wrong: I’m not saying that these things are ok. I’m making the point that to varying degrees, we can expect this. Jesus says that in this world we will have trouble. Why? Because, ultimately, it’s not our home. **Being a Christian in this in between age means that we’re involved in working for justice and mercy and we’re not fearful when the world’s systems fight back.**

INSPIRATION

Story about MLK: “Everyone knew who the real coward in the room was that day.”

Transition: I want to invite you to put a practice in place that could move us all toward responding in the the way of radical love.

CONCLUSION

Next Step:

- In what ways does anxiety block your ability to respond well? How can you become a non-anxious presence to love others well?

Prayer