

“Wonderful News for the Peacemakers”

A BETTER LIFE Sermon Series | Week Eight | Newbreak Church

October 24th, 2021

In this week’s study, Jesus teaches us about facing hostility because we follow Him. This sermon answers the question: How do I respond when I face opposition because of my faith?

Start Here

- What was your favorite part of fall as a kid? Do you still enjoy that now as an adult?
- Have you ever persecuted anyone? How does that impact how you treat others now?

Going Deeper Into the Message

Point 1 – God celebrates those who remain faithful to the way of Jesus even when opposition comes.

Matthew 5:10-12 (N.T. Wright’s Translation) Wonderful news for people who are **persecuted because of God’s way!** The kingdom of heaven **belongs to you.** Wonderful news for you, when people slander you and persecute you, and say all kinds of wicked things about you falsely because of me! **Celebrate and rejoice:** there’s a great reward for you in heaven. That’s how they persecuted the prophets who went before you.’

This is the last and most unique “beatitude” because it is not something we do or be but is something that happens to us as a response to our being devoted to Jesus and His way of life.

As Christ-followers, our hope is to follow Jesus and live a life that looks more and more like Him. Our dream life would be a life that is full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control over every decision we

make. That's what it looks like to be more like Jesus and that is something that Jesus wants for all of his followers.

At the same time, when we signed up to follow Jesus, there was some “not so fine print” that lays out what one of the results of putting our faith in Jesus would be.

- Yes there is joy.
- Yes there is peace.
- Yes there is hope.
- ***And Yes, there will be opposition.***

If a follower of Jesus is being “mocked” or “ridiculed” for their faith, then clearly, he or she is not being a hermit. We are not called to a private righteousness that hides from society.

The verb *diōkō* (“to persecute”) could refer to physical violence, verbal abuse, or both. It is “for the sake of” or because of their righteousness that the righteous are in fact harassed. **Persecution is simply the clash between two irreconcilable value-systems.** The participle (“who are persecuted”) is in the perfect tense, likely entailing the continual results of persecution that have stretched back into the past, alluding (likely) to the spiritual ancestors who were persecuted too.

Opposition reminds me that the kingdom of heaven is mine.

[Matthew 5:10 ...The kingdom of heaven belongs to you.](#)

What is the kingdom of heaven? God's rule and reign. The King, the place, the people, receiving God's blessing. Following Jesus' way (living a life of obedience) of living leads to truth and abundant life (and worth any hardship). It's as Ignatius of Loyola once said: “It's not hard to obey when you love the one who you obey.”

We need to remember who the real opposition is. He (Satan) couldn't have it so he doesn't want anyone to have it.

[“Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life” \(John 10:9-10, NLT\).](#)

What are the other positives of doing things Jesus's way, even if it is not culturally praised?

- Clear conscience
- Sets an example for others
- We get to relate to Jesus in a new way (sharing in his sufferings, as Philippians 3:9 says)

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

- How does this beatitude encourage you?
- While we don't want to exaggerate our circumstances in the American Church (not being "persecuted" in the way Christians in the Middle East are), we do experience ridicule and slander for following Jesus (as Matthew 5:11-12 alludes to). What ways have you experienced opposition because of your faith?
- We don't have to go looking for trouble or opposition, it will come to find us. What are some appropriate ways to respond to the kinds of experiences (question 2) we face? How can we challenge ourselves to respond in a way that emulates Jesus? (*We will talk more about this below!*)

Point 2 – Fight back like Jesus did.

Matthew 5:43-48 (MSG) "You're familiar with the old written law, '**Love your friend**,' and its unwritten companion, '**Hate your enemy**.' I'm challenging that. I'm telling you to **love your enemies**. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, **respond with the supple moves of prayer**, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves. **This is what God does**. He gives his best—the sun to warm and the rain to nourish—to **everyone**, regardless: **the good and bad, the nice and nasty**. If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that. **In a word, what I'm saying is Grow up**. You're kingdom subjects. **Now live like it**. Live out your God-created identity. Live **generously** and **graciously** toward others, **the way God lives toward you**."

It is easy to respond to anger with anger, to ridicule with ridicule, and to personal attack with a personal attack ("to fight fire with fire"). That is the nature of all people in sin, to respond in sin. However, we, as Christ-followers, are no longer in our sin. We are a new creation. In that, we have an obligation and an opportunity to respond to attacks in a new way. We can shock and amaze those who would attack us by responding with love and genuine care for their well-being and future. When we do this, we are showing the character of God.

If we respond to persecution the same way an unbeliever would, what are the benefits of being a Christ-follower that we get to show the world? Why should they have a desire to know Christ and live a life surrendered to Him if we are as angry and frustrated and thrown off by persecution as anyone else would be?

When we fight back with the love of Christ, we are attacking the true enemy, Satan. “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12, NIV). We are taking away his power. We are not giving him a foothold. We are taking ground for the kingdom of God. That is how we fight back as Jesus did.

We need to care about the people who are persecuting us because God cares for them. We need to respond in kindness because Romans 2:4 tells us “that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?” We cannot do this alone, but Jesus can do it in us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

- How can you see others as Christ sees them, especially when you are being attacked?
- Do you have joy, not happiness, when you are being persecuted? How can you begin to experience joy in the midst of persecution?
- Do you look forward to the reward of the kingdom belonging to you when you are persecuted for righteousness? What are the benefits of the kingdom of God belonging to us?

—FINAL CHALLENGE QUESTIONS—

How are you going to think differently in light of what you have read, heard, and discussed this week?

What is one thing you are going to change in your life in light of the sermon?

BONUS: For those of you with kids or around kids: What is one truth from this message that you can share with your kids?