**BLESSED ARE THE PEACEFUL & THE PERSECUTED**

**Final Week of a 4-Week Series on the Beatitudes: “Attitudes of Being”**

**Sunday, June 11, 2023**

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*So this elderly guy goes to the doctor and he says, "Doc! Doc! I think my wife's going deaf!"*

*And the doctor says, "Well, just test it at home; see how severe it is before we bring her in to give her some treatment."*

*So that evening, the wife is cooking dinner and her husband goes 15 feet behind her and says, "Honey, what's for dinner?" No response. Then he move up 10 feet behind her and says, "Honey, what's for dinner?" No response. Five feet behind her: "Honey, what's for dinner?" No response. And directly behind her: "Honey, what's for dinner?"*

*And she turns around and angrily yells, "For the fourth time, I said chicken!"*

[Congregation laughs] That'll hit you on the way home! It's a better joke a half-hour or so later. Anyway ...

So how many people here have ever been so worried and stressed about a problem or situation in your life that you couldn't concentrate; couldn't get it off your mind; and even had a hard time sleeping? Anybody ever been that mentally consumed?

How many people here have ever felt judged and criticized for your decisions; your lifestyle; or your beliefs? Anybody ever been ...? And how many people here have ever faced such adversity it brought you to your knees, and you almost felt like giving up? Anybody faced that much adversity?

So today we're going to address those concerns and questions in a deeper way as we wrap up our four-week series on Jesus' Beatitudes. And the Beatitudes are the eight statements before Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount.

And one of the things is: I don't think we get the richness and the depth because of the translation from Jesus' original language -- Aramaic -- to Greek, and then to English. It misses out some of the depth and the wisdom that is encased in these powerful statements. Aramaic scholar Neal Douglas Klotz said:

*"The Bible translation misses many layers of meaning that creates separation between God, nature and humanity."*

Because Aramaic looks at these truths from the literal; from the metaphorical; and the mystical level. And there is no sharp differences between means and ends; and inner and outer. For instance, the "kingdom of heaven" is within and without. Your neighbor is without and within. Your self is within and without. There is a clear connectedness of mind, body and spirit, and there's a much more holistic view and perspective to these truths and principles.

The word "Beatitude" means "the blessedness of life." And what it's saying is: If you attain these mental states -- these mindsets and perspectives -- spiritually that you will experience the blessedness of life ... the fullness and the joyfulness and the fulfillment of life that we are all seeking. But they must be practiced! We must meditate and contemplate and reflect and take these things in deeper so we can embody, express and experience them.

And so I have not used or shared any of the Aramaic words; that would mean me butchering that ... would do no good to anybody. [Congregation laughs] So I've just been sharing what the actual translations are. And the thing about them ... I'm going to review all the previous six, and we'll look at seven and eight today.

But the most confusing ones are really the first three. Because they're saying: Your life will be blessed if you do this. And the first one is to be **"poor in spirit."** That doesn't have, like, the golden ticket to happiness to me: to be poor in spirit! [Congregants laugh]

But what it actually means is: For those who are willing to empty themselves of their attachments; their need for control; and the need to be right ... Because when we're so filled with those, it's hard to be filled with the love and the peace of God. And so the whole idea to be "poor in spirit" is to empty ourselves of all of those things so that we can be filled with the kingdom of heaven.

So everyone, take a deep breath. As you exhale, feel yourself emptying yourself of the need for control and to be right. And then, as you inhale, feel yourself filled with the kingdom of heaven: the kingdom of possibilities and goodness and joy.

Again, exhale; empty yourself. Inhale; fill yourself. And it is that mindset of emptying ourselves and openings ourselves to God that is one of the key principles of allowing God to move through and work through our lives. We must be poor of spirit; we must be willing to empty ourselves.

And then the second one is, **"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."** Again, this doesn't sound like a great thing; but it's a powerful thing! Because we're not just physical beings and spiritual beings; we are emotional beings. And we feel hurt and loss and sadness and betrayal. And sometimes, as human beings, we don't want to feel pain, so we stuff and bury our feelings. Sometimes we aren't willing to process and feel and deal with these feelings, and they create a block, and block us from feeling happiness and a sense of peace.

And what this is saying is: When we mourn -- when we feel and process ... Jesus wept! Jesus felt angry! He moved through his emotions! It says then you will get new life; new fulfillment; new possibilities; new opportunities. But you've got to walk through that process.

The third one is, **"Blessed are the meek."** Now, meekness sounds like weakness ... but it's not! It is actually a calm, centered strength. A steadfast strength that is based in humility and gentleness. It is a strength that helps us in two ways. One: self-awareness. You cannot change or improve your life unless you have some awareness of what's going on right now. And it takes humility and strength to be self-aware; to be honest with what's really going on.

And the second strength of humility is self-discipline. It takes humility and strength to be disciplined and have self-control. Scripture says, *"God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, love and self-discipline."* Because we need discipline to succeed in our lives! To create positive habits and practices.

The fourth one is, **"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."** When you hunger and thirst, it means that you yearn; you have a desire. It is something that you want -- that you want profoundly. And when we do -- when we desire balance or health or good or more God, more joy -- that yearning helps us be fulfilled. It helps create and attract.

So it's really talking about a mindset that knows what we hold in our intention and vision, that we will attract those things in our lives. It's a great power and mindset we have. What we hunger for will be filled.

And then last week we looked at, **"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."** One of the reasons mercy is so important is because it takes love and compassion and forgiveness and thoughtfulness and a willingness to be generous and caring for others. Unless we are merciful ... If we are only willing to hold on to grudges and not be merciful, a closed heart does not lead to happiness. But being merciful -- having compassion -- is an important thing.

And the translation really said it's like a womb, and having something birthed forth. Mercy is not something we do reluctantly; it's something that has to be sincere and come from deep within us. The whole idea of a womb -- of it being birthed from the very core of divine love in us -- is an important thing. And when we birth it sincerely and put it out there, that love and compassion to others -- it will come back to us and move in a positive way in our lives.

And the final one from last week was, **"Blessed are the pure in heart."** To be pure in heart ... Like, your heart back then was considered the center of our being. That our heart is that core place out of which all good flows. So the more we center in our hearts -- the more we are centered in a divine place -- the more good will flow, and we will be able to see God. Now, Jesus also said we have eyes but do not see. And what that means is: We have to keep coming back to center -- keep coming back to our hearts -- so we can see God and allow the love in us to flow more freely.

So we'll wrap up with the seventh, which is, **"Blessed are the peacemakers, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"** and the eighth, **"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake."**

How many people have ever seen Monty Python's Life of Brian? Anybody ever seen that? So there's a scene where Jesus is giving his Sermon on the Mount with the crowd gathered underneath. And at the back of the crowd, some of the people can't hear, and they're arguing. And someone said, *"What did he say?"* And someone turned back and said, *"He said, 'Blessed are the cheesemakers.'"*

And the guy says, *"Cheesemakers? What's so great about cheesemakers?"*

And someone responded to her and said, *"No; it's not to be taken literally. He means, 'Blessed are any and all manufacturers of dairy products.'"* [Congregation laughs]

**"Blessed are the peacemakers."** When I first heard this, I thought, "*Oh, the peacemakers! Well, that's cool; being blessed by all the people who are trying to make peace in communities and countries and so on."*

But what it really means is: Blessed are those who, first, are willing to make peace within themselves. Because you can't have outer peace until you create inner peace. And that's such an important thing. I really believe that inner peace is the greatest gift and the thing that we seek more than we realize. We could have all the money in the world; we can have all the power and all the success. But if we don't feel peace of mind, we will not be able to enjoy it; we will not be able to be present for it. Because our minds will always be distracted and in turmoil and feeling a sense of restlessness.

The Aramaic translation says:

*"Integrated are those who joyfully knit themselves together within; they shall be stamped with the seal of cosmic identity."*

To me, a sign you know that your prayer life is effective is how much peace of mind you're feeling. A sign that you're on the spiritual path is how much of God's peace you are feeling in your heart. Jesus said:

*"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you."*

To feel a sense of peace and serenity -- to feel a sense of calmness and centeredness -- is one of the greatest gifts of life. And it says something in the Bible:

*"The peace of God that surpasses all human understanding."*

That is to know that, even with things crashing around in the world, if we feel peace in our hearts, that is the most important thing. We don't have to wait for life to be perfect to feel peace. It is that we can get that peace that surpasses all human understanding right here and now if we are willing to make peace within ourselves.

So my question is: Where in your life are you not feeling peace? Where in your life are you feeling some inner turmoil? And what do you need to make peace with? And what will it take for you to feel a sense of peace right here in this moment?

So I think there are three things that we need to do to make peace and to be a peacemaker.

The first one is to focus our hearts and minds on God. In the Book of Isaiah, it says:

*"You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon you."*

So when we center our mind on God, we are filled with peace. And we have to keep filling our mind with God; filling our mind with God. And we keep coming back to peace; keep coming back to peace. And it takes work!

In the Book of Philippians, it says:

*"Do not be anxious about anything; but in all things, with prayer and supplication and with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God, and the peace of God that surpasses understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."*

And what it's saying is: Turn away from worry and stress and turmoil and turn your mind to God. To rest in the peaceful presence of God and then you will fee that peace within.

The second thing to be a peacemaker is to call yourself a child of God and actually mean it! Eric Butterworth says:

*"If you say 'I am a child of God' and believe it, it means that you know that, as a child of God, you have within you the potential for peace."*

And for love and for harmony and overcoming at all times. As a child of God, we are a radiating center for peace; a radiating center for love. But you've got to believe that you're a child of God. You know, we can say that we're a child of God, but do you believe that you are God's beloved child? Do you believe that you're created in the image and likeness of God? Do you believe that all that God is is already within you if you open yourself to it?

*"I am a child of God."*

Let's say that half-voice together: [with congregation] *"I am a child of God."*

Take a deep breath and believe that that is true.

Let's go even quieter. Together: [with congregation] *"I am a child of God."*

Believe that! Take a deep breath and believe!

Even softer: [with congregation] *"I am a child of God."*

Believe it and take a deep breath.

*"I am a radiating center of peace and love."*

Together: [with congregation] *"I am a radiating center of peace and love."*

Take a deep breath. Believe it!

Again, even softer: [with congregation] *"I am a radiating center of peace and love."*

Believe it! Deep breath. So now full voice: *"I am a child of God."*

Together: [with congregation] *"I am a child of God."*

Deep breath. Believe it!

*"I am a radiating center of peace and love!"*

Together: [with congregation] *"I am a radiating center of peace and love."*

Take a deep breath. Turn to the person on your right and say, *"You are a child of God and you are a radiating center of peace and love."*

[With congregation]: *"You are a child of God and you are a radiating center of peace and love."* Thank you!

Alright. And so the third thing to become a peacemaker and make peace within is to embody and commit yourself to the activity and the work of peace. You know, "children" in Aramaic actually translates to be "the embodiment of activity." Our offspring are the embodiment of activity. And so it means to be active!

You know, the whole idea of peace --it conveys the idea of planting and tilling the soil and fertilizing so something will grow and be harvested and celebrated. And it takes work -- it takes effort -- to bring peace forth peace in our lives. So we need to practice the activities of peace that include acceptance. Acceptance can bring peace to us. The willingness to listen. The willingness to have dialogue and conversation. The willingness to compromise. The willingness to cooperate. I mean, there are all kinds of activities and work and practices that cultivate and bring forth this great thing called peace.

St. Francis of Assisi said:

*"Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace."*

And that's the level of commitment and work that we need to do if we want to be peacemakers. If we want to feel peace in our hearts, we have to allow peace to be a priority.

The words "Shalom" and "Salam" that mean peace were originally as if to say, *"Let's remember that we all came from one Source."* Because when we're at peace and at one with ourselves and our Source -- at peace and at one knowing that we are all connected -- peace fills our hearts. Peace can fill our lives.

The peace that surpasses all understanding is attainable, but it takes work. It takes a willingness and an effort to turn to God, to know that we're children of God and believe it, and then to practice the activity of peace.

The Aramaic translation says:

*"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall become fountains of livingness.”
and
"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall hasten the coming of God's new creation."*

Let's all commit to being a peacemaker: for inner peace and outer peace.

And the final Beatitude is, **"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

And so the fact is: Every one of us, at times in our lives, will feel a lack of support. We will feel abandoned; we'll feel rejected; we'll feel a bit ashamed or even ridiculed while we are doing our very best. How many people have ever felt persecuted in some way? Misunderstood; mistreated; or unappreciated for doing good things?

Jesus is trying to say here that sometimes in life, you're going to experience opposition. That you're going to experience resistance and you're going to experience adversity in living your best life. In honoring the truth that you were meant to follow and doing what Spirit is guiding you to do. Jesus is not saying, *"Throw yourself a pity party,"* and he's not saying, *"Go be a martyr and a doormat"* in any way. But the reality of what he's trying to say is: Life is tough, and sometimes you're going to experience resistance. Everybody's not going to jump on your bandwagon.

Things are not always going to go smoothly ... and it's how you're going to handle that in your life That's what this Beatitude's about. And it's powerful, because sometimes -- even when we're doing our best and doing good things -- sometimes we will get negative energy back.

Let me give you an example. When I was in school, there was a little girl, Jane. She always did everything nice. Did all her homework. She was always volunteering to brush off the chalkboard. And people would go, "Oh, little Miss Goody Two-Shoes." She's doing what we all should be doing, but we're making fun. And sometimes ... You ever have a family member not support your goal or dream, or discourage you? Even when people love us, we run against resistance. We run against opposition.

And I think some of that is exactly how life is supposed to be, to bring it forth out of us. Do you know if you took a butterfly cocoon and opened it before it was born, it would die. You know why? Because pushing its wings against the cocoon to break it open sends blood down the wings, and that's what gives it the strength to fly. It's the struggle! And every one of us has things to struggle to that will bring out our strength, that will bring out our best. and that's what this Beatitude is saying.

Think of somebody you think is a great hero; someone who's done something great. And I will bet they had something to overcome. I bet there was resistance. I bet there was opposition. And you can go back: Martin Luther King; Rosa Parks; Gandhi; Mandela; Amelia Earhart, the first woman to fly across the Atlantic; Ellen DeGeneres; Cleopatra. The reason I picked Cleopatra: She was the ruler of Egypt for 30 years back in 69 BC. I mean, she was a mover and a shaker; you think she got support all the way? Thirty years leader of Egypt.

Madame Curie -- one of my heroes! 1903: she was the first woman to win a Nobel Prize in physics. 1911: First person to win two Nobel Prizes, this one in chemistry. The reason I mention her is because here's a quote of hers that I love. She said:

*"Life isn't easy for any of us. But what of it? We must have perseverance and, above all, confidence in ourselves. We must believe that we are gifted for something, and that thing must be attained."*

So what it's saying is: In your life -- whatever it is you're meant to do -- that you're going to get opposition and resistance. it's going to be a big of a struggle and a challenge. And it's meant to, because it's meant to bring out our best. It is meant to ... yeah! To help us live to a higher level and a fullness of who we came here to be.

Translation says:

*"Tuned to the Source are those persecuted for trying to right society's balance. To them belongs the coming king and queendom."*

And so it's saying: We all have a responsibility to bring forth the gifts that we are to make this a better world. To help create heaven on earth. To make this a better world for all of us. We all have that work to do. And here's how we're supposed to respond:

*"Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for your reward is great in heaven."*

And doesn't it kind of remind you of Philippians when it says:

*"Count it all joy, brethren, when you face trials of any kinds, because you know the testing of your faith produces perseverance, and let perseverance finish its work so that you will be whole, complete and lacking in nothing."*

The challenges -- the opposition -- is to help develop spiritual maturity and spiritual mastery. It's not there against us. That's why it says, "Be exceedingly glad" that what is up in your life right now and challenging you is there, because it's going to help grow you. It will bring you greater joy. So invest yourself in it! Move all of yourself in it.

You know, one of the greatest things about persecution. Spiritual growth ain't easy; it takes work. It takes a lot of work. But you know what makes it tougher? Is inner persecution. How many people have ever been hard on yourself? Beat yourself up? Anybody ever ... Okay; four or five of us. Perfect! [Congregation laughs]

I used to be really rough on myself. I mean, oh man; all kinds of things. When I would do a talk and I'd mess up a line, or I'd think, *"Oh, I should have said this; I should have said that."* And today I'm way, way nicer and more gentle on myself. Oh, I tell a joke and it doesn't go good ... like this morning's. [Congregation laughs] You think*, "That's okay!"* And we need to learn how to be more gentle, more loving and supporting of one another and not persecute ourselves. Life's already tough!

And that's a part of our learning curve and our maturity -- is how to treat ourselves well. How to love ourselves; how to realize we are a child of God. We are an instrument of peace. And we need to be as supportive of ourselves as possible.

You know, every one of us deserves a richer and more meaningful and fulfilling life. And the Beatitudes really gives us the eight mindsets out of which to live life and to live it more joyously and abundantly. It is really an invitation to a higher level of awareness and to allow ourselves to experience the powerful truth of the Beatitudes and the true blessedness of life.

God bless you all!

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