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Peace and Persecution, Salt and Light (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In a discussion of the Beatitudes, Steve Gregg explores the deeper meanings behind being blessed and called the sons of God. He emphasizes the importance of reconciling with God, as without surrendering to Him, there is no hope. Gregg also notes the significance of bearing spiritual characteristics in the same way a child bears physical characteristics from their parents, highlighting the idea that a person's actions and relationship with God can be reflected in their children. Overall, Gregg emphasizes the value of peace and the role of Christians as salt and light in the world.

Transcript

In this session, we're going to take the last two of the Beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5 and go on through verse 20 of Matthew chapter 5. We were supposed to, it was scheduled for us to take all the Beatitudes in our last session, but we just didn't do it. I didn't do it. We took six of them, as well as the Beatitudes in Luke, but we just didn't have the time to cover all the Beatitudes.

So we'll finish up what we should have finished last time, as well as taking the new material, which takes us up through verse 20. Matthew chapter 5, and today we put in at verse 9, Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. Now, are you chewing one of those pieces of gum? You are already.

Now, is that embarrassment or is that something you ate? Okay, combination. Both now. Okay.

Peacemaking is a skill, and we've studied in the past, in our relationship series, things about the maintaining of unity and harmony in relationships, and no doubt that's an important function in peacemaking. Perhaps the emphasis I would like to make about this is what Jesus said about those who are peacemakers. In addition to their being blessed, he gives a very good reason that they are blessed, and that is because they shall be called the sons of God.

Now, it doesn't specify whether it is God who will call them his sons or whether others will do so. Obviously, for God to write God as his sons is the most important thing, but

it's also, I think, desirable that others would recognize us as children of God. And the way that a child is recognized as belonging to a father is by resemblance.

Children, if they take after their fathers in something they do, in some mannerism or in their personality or in the way they look, they are often said to be a chip off the old block. In other words, they're the same stuff as their father. And it's fairly common, it's not a universal trait, but it's fairly common for people to look quite a bit like their fathers, especially for men too.

And also, in the old days especially, to take up the vocation that their fathers took up, and to pick up the values of their parents and so forth. It was not so much like today, where the children aren't really raised by their parents for the most part. They spend several hours every day under the tutorage of other teachers in most cases, and really getting their values not so much from home as from their peers.

Of course, they get some of their values from home and some from their peers, and a lot of times these are in conflict. But it has been the case that as long as there have been mandatory schooling that has taken children out of the home, there has been every 15 years or so a counterculture of young people that reject the culture of their parents and the values of their parents, and try to do something outlandish to scandalize their parents. It doesn't mean that every kid does this, but it's a phenomenon that sociologists have observed.

Every 15 years a new counterculture arises, and this is due to the fact that whereas children used to pick up the values, and even the trade of their parents in many cases, and the religion and the beliefs, that was because they were trained at home by their parents. But as soon as children were taken out of the home, and put among their peers, the most important people they wished to please were of course those that they spent the most time with, whose approval mattered the most, and that was their peers. And so they often would opt for their peers' ideas of what's good and what's bad, and what's to be followed, instead of their parents.

And this is, of course, it's not so much the case today. What I'm saying is this has resulted in a situation where it's not as universal today, that a child will resemble his parents in his viewpoints, in his behavior, and even in his vocation in many ways. In the old days it was fairly well assumed that it'd be the exceptional child who didn't take up his father's line of work, or who didn't accept his parents' values, and run his family about the same way his father ran the family, and so forth.

The culture of the parents was to be passed down to the children, as the law of Moses insisted they should. Now that was a reality in the days that Jesus spoke this thing, and it was a given far more than it is in our own day that children will act like their parents to a certain extent, will think like their parents, and will to a certain extent look like their parents. And in many cases, because the child bears such a striking resemblance in

these areas to his parents, it's often easy to recognize whose child somebody is by that resemblance.

Now we're talking in terms of the natural here. But Jesus said that those who would be called or recognized as the sons of God are those who are peacemakers, which suggests that they bear a trait like their father, like God, and it is the trait of peacemaking. Now, one would guess from this that God himself must be one who makes peace.

If the presence of that trait in a child of his is that which causes that child to be recognized as having a relationship to him as father, then it is to be assumed that God is himself a peacemaker, and indeed he is. And the Bible stresses this in a number of places. For example, in 2 Corinthians 5, beginning with verse 18, Paul said, Now all things are of God who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. Not imputing their trespasses to them and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ as though God were pleading through us.

We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. Now, here it says that God is a reconciler. He has done what was necessary to reconcile the world to himself.

The word reconcile means to bring about a peaceable relationship where there was formerly hostility and alienation. Paul doesn't make this point because he assumes it to be recognized by his readers that prior to becoming Christians we're not at peace with God. Prior to becoming Christians we're enemies of God, we're at war with God.

And there's no peace for the wicked, it says twice in the book of Isaiah. The person who is at war with God is going to be fighting an unenviable warfare because he's fighting against God and God either will not surrender or will. Now, either one is hard on the sinner.

If God doesn't surrender, then that sinner who is in rebellion is going to have God on his back like the hound of heaven until the day he dies or repents. On the other hand, if God does surrender and say, okay, I give up on you, that's worse yet. Because if God stops convicting, if God stops leaning on you in your rebellion, it's an indication that he's given up on you and there's no hope for you then.

Paul talks about people who fall into that state in Romans chapter 1. The ones who did not wish to retain God in their knowledge and they changed the image of the incorruptible God into the image of man and four-footed beasts and birds and fowls and so forth. And he said, therefore God gave them up. Well, that's about the worst thing God could ever do.

Stop making war against the sinner and stop pressing for surrender. If God surrenders,

the sinner has no hope. And if God doesn't surrender, the sinner has no relief except in repentance or death.

And death is no relief to the sinner. It's only the beginning of greater woes. Therefore, every man who is a sinner and unrepentant is at war with God.

And peace with God is not a given. There is a sentimental idea. I don't hear it as much as apparently our parents' generation did because an older generation of preachers were continually trying to answer this opinion, which must have been more prevalent in the days of our parents' generation or at least put in these terms more often in those days.

There was the view of the brotherhood of man and the universal fatherhood of God. I suppose the view is still with us among non-Christians and even among liberal Christians. I just don't hear it put in those terms quite as much.

But it's not uncommon at all for older preachers and their writings and so forth to continually come against this idea of the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God, which makes me think there must have been some strong cultural or philosophical influence in their day that was using those terms and the preachers felt they had to answer them. But the idea was that the average sinner may feel that he is a son of God simply by virtue of having been created by God and that God is everybody's father. Now, there is a sense in which that can be said to be true.

Even Paul seemed to favorably quote a Greek poet in Acts 17 who said, We are all God's offspring. Although after quoting him, Paul didn't affirm that that was true, but he said, But if we are his offspring, then he must not be wood and stone and things like idols. He must be a living God.

There is a sense in which all humans are the offspring of God. Adam is called the son of God and we're all sons of Adam. So if you trace human ancestry back far enough, I guess we're all sons of God, but not in the sense that matters.

The prodigal son who left home was also a son of his father, but he was a dead son until he returned. He who was dead became alive, his father said. But being a son didn't profit him if he was not in connection with his father.

And the significant way in which the term son of God is used in the Bible of Christians is obviously in a way that does not apply to unbelievers because Jesus made it clear that certain people are children of the devil and therefore not all are children of God. But the ones who are the children of God are those who exhibit the traits and the characteristics of God. One of those is that God is a peacemaker.

Man was at war with God and God reached out, not imputing their sins against them, and made peace. And he's given us this ministry of making peace or reconciliation. Reconciliation just means peacemaking.

This has ramifications two ways for us. One, our ministry of reconciliation is trying to bring people to the place of peace with God because that's what God has shown himself committed to, bringing people into peace with himself. The ministry of reconciliation that we have is first of all that, that we try to bring people into peace with God.

We preach the gospel, we urge them to repentance, or as Paul said, actually in the same chapter, I believe, or a little earlier, in verse 11, 2 Corinthians 5.11, he says, knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men. That's peacemaking. When you seek to persuade men to avoid the terror of God, to avoid, that is, the horrors of judgment, to find peace with God, to be reconciled with God, that is a Christian's peacemaking duty first and foremost, is to try to bring people into peace with God.

God was so concerned that men and the world would be at peace with him that he was in Christ trying to reconcile the world to himself. So the first aspect of peacemaking is to make peace between man and God. But in God's example, we see another level of peacemaking, and that is that what God did in reconciling the world to himself was not counting their sins against them that they had committed against him.

Now to be like him, we must be similar, that we don't count it against people when they sin against us. You see, God not only wanted people reconciled to himself and wants us to get other people reconciled to him, but he wants us to be like him in allowing others to be reconciled to ourselves, even those who have offended, even those who have sinned against us, wronged us. A peacemaker is one who is willing to absorb the injury rather than perpetrate further violence or aggression or hostility.

And as long as a person holds a grudge and does not seek reconciliation through the biblical manners, that person cannot be described as a peacemaker. They certainly can't be described as doing what God did. Therefore, they don't give evidence of being sons of God.

Now being a son of God doesn't come about by being a peacemaker. I want to make that clear. I'm not suggesting that if you want to become a son of God, you'd better start being a peacemaker.

But rather, just as my child doesn't, insofar as my children may look like me, they didn't become my children by looking like me. They look like me because they are my children, insofar as they do. I don't know that they look so much like me, as they look more like their mother.

But the point is, the likeness to the father is a result of being a child. It's not the cause of being a child. And it's not by being peacemakers that we become children of God, but by being peacemakers that we show that that's what we are.

We exhibit the family resemblance. God is a peacemaker. We ought to be peacemakers.

We ought to encourage people to be at peace with God and at peace with ourselves. And we've seen scriptures on this in our relationship series. We probably don't need to dwell on them at too much length.

But in Romans chapter 12, Paul seems to have this thought clearly before him, and he is, I think, very clearly thinking of the Sermon on the Mount in this particular passage in Romans 12. He said, Repay no one evil for evil. Verse 17 of Romans 12.

Have regard for the good things in the sight of all men. If it's possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourself, but rather give place to wrath.

He says, If your enemy hungers, feed him. If he thirsts, give him drink. Now, this is being a peacemaker.

This is doing what God does. God gives drink to his enemies. He gives food to his enemies when they're hungry.

In so far as anyone who is not on God's side still eats or drinks, we have to give God the credit for providing for them. And therefore, to do that toward your enemies is to at least rob your enemies of any excuse for being enemies of yours. Yes, John.

Uh-huh. In this, the love of God was demonstrated that when we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Yeah, that's an ideal picture, you know, of one who is a peacemaker, taking people who were his enemies, who were sinners, and making personal sacrifices to bring about reconciliation.

Yeah, actually, any scripture that tells about what God did by sending Christ is in itself related to this point. And as far as our own response to it, to act like God is the way to show that there is a true relationship there between us and God. To bear this spiritual characteristic, even as a child bears a physical characteristic of his father, and acts like his father.

So we are to do the same. In Ephesians, particularly, in Ephesians 5.1, it says, Therefore, be followers, some translations say imitators, because that's what the Greek word means, be imitators of God as dear children. In other words, just like children imitate their father, we are supposed to imitate God, like children do.

That our relationship to him, as children, will be seen by the fact that we do the same things he does. Now look a few chapters earlier in Ephesians, in Ephesians 2. In Ephesians 2.14-17, it says, For he himself is our peace, who has made both, meaning the Jew and the Gentile, one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us, having abolished in his flesh, meaning when Jesus died, the enmity or the hostility. That is the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in himself one new man from the two, thus making peace.

That's peacemaking, is it not? When you make peace? God has done this. He's made peace. And that he might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

And he came and preached peace to those of you who are far off, and to those who are near. Now, what he's saying here is God's act of peacemaking extends even beyond his act of reconciling the world to himself. But it goes so far as to reconcile factions in the world to each other, to making peace between divided portions of humanity.

The passage we just read has to do with Jews and Gentiles. We didn't read earlier on, but essentially in verse 12, just prior to the passage, he said, at that time you Gentiles were without Christ being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. We were far from the Jews.

The Gentiles and Israel were alienated from each other. And he goes on to say, but God changed that. He brought peace between the two.

He made both one in Christ, thus making peace. So that what God has done is not only sought to make us come to a peaceable relationship with himself, but sought to arrange for peaceful relationships between other parties. And that's the third aspect of peacemaking.

I said the first aspect is trying to bring people to Christ so that they'll have peace with God. A second is trying to reconcile them to yourself as God reconciled the world to himself. So forgiving people their trespasses and seeking reconciliation between yourself and parties that are offended or that you have been offended by.

But the third aspect is when you're a peacemaker, you try to make peace between other parties. You come as a third party into a situation where persons are alienated and you do what you can to make peace between them. And that's what God did in Ephesians chapter 2. He took the Jews and the Gentiles that were not at peace with each other and in Christ he made them one.

He removed the grounds for hostility and he made peace. So peacemaking is seen at three levels. The peacemaker, the Christian, is obsessed with peace to a certain extent.

Now, peace, by the way, can become an idol. Even I have felt that I've met some in the so-called peace churches, and this would be largely the Mennonite churches, and this is not true of all peace, not true of all Mennonite churches at all, but I have encountered some Mennonite churches that lay such an emphasis on their witness for peace that they almost fall in with liberalism, political liberalism, in the peace movement which is more or less Marxist, which I think people can make peace an idol. I am for peace because Christ is for peace, but I'm only for peace on the same terms Christ is for peace on.

He's not in favor of sort of an irresponsible blanket peace with all men. There are certain people he is still at war with, and he's not just going to lay down his arms for the sake of

peace. It would not be to the good of the universe or to the good of the kingdom of God for God to say, oh, well, I'm not going to resist these sinners anymore.

I'm going to just be at peace with them, and since they're not going to surrender to me, I'll surrender to them, and we'll just have a jolly old time. That's not responsible peace. God wants peace, but he wants it on responsible terms, and it has to be that those who are lawbreakers, those who are enemies of truth and of good, must surrender, and until they do, there will not be peace with them.

Therefore, as a peacemaker, there is no guarantee that you will be successful in bringing everyone into a peaceful relationship with yourself or with each other. Marriage counselors are in the role of peacemakers. They don't all do a great job, and even the ones who do a good job aren't always successful because a lot of times marriages are pretty far gone by the time they come to the counselor, but there's a typical example of a Christian being in a position to help make peace between alienated parties, but it happens in non-defined relations as well.

There are people who just get a grievance against somebody else, and a Christian should be skilled at intervening, not meddling, but intervening for the glory of God and seeking to find out where the communication breakdown is or which party is simply refusing to submit to the truth of God and being somewhat confrontational in the situation. The Bible does say if you see a brother overtaken and at fault, you who are spiritual, go and restore such a one in the spirit of meekness. Considering yourself, it is possible to meekly intervene in business that the parties might not even want you intervening in, but because they are at fault, they need to be confronted.

In any case, the peacemaking effort is many-faceted. We first of all want people to be at peace with God, secondarily with ourselves, and thirdly with everyone else. We want people to be at peace with everyone else, and we are laboring and living, hopefully in such a way as to encourage that, because that's what God himself does.

God was a peacemaker according to Ephesians chapter 2. God is a peacemaker according to 2 Corinthians chapter 5. He's reconciling the world to himself. Therefore, when we make peace in the same manner that God does, we are demonstrating the family relationship. We have his trait.

We're following in his business, the family trade, and we bear resemblance to him so that we will be called the sons of God. And by the way, I do believe that while the most important thing is for God to call us his sons, I think that for the world to know that we are truly the sons of God, for the world to know that we are truly followers of Christ, is a very important thing. And the world doesn't know that at this point, because Christians have not been very consistent or very committed to making peace in the biblical manner.

In many cases, they're as quick to fly off the handle as non-Christians are, as quick to take up arms against enemies as others are, rather than communicating to the world that God has a different way of resolving conflict between people than the world does. The church has modeled, to a very large extent, a false message. The message is the church doesn't have any better way to resolve conflicts than the world does.

Therefore, if the world has a conflict that they want to go to war about, Christians jump right in and go to war with them. And, you know, that simply is a scandal, because people who don't show themselves to make peace in the manner that God does, but seek to involve themselves in worldly, or even what the Bible calls demonic, peacemaking efforts, I think they don't show themselves to be sons of God in that respect. Now, there is an amplification on this beatitude in the later verses of the Sermon on the Mount, in fact, in the later verses of Matthew 5. I don't want to steal too much thunder from a later lecture, but let me just point out to you how Jesus amplifies on this a little further down in the same chapter.

In verse 38 through 48, we read, You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you not to resist the evil person, but whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn him the other also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.

Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him too. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you, do not turn away. Now, that's just the beginning of the passage I want to read.

I want to read further, but let me just say that all these things that Jesus has just said in these verses have to do with removing any grounds for him to have a grievance against you. If somebody wants something from you, give it to him. Even if you don't think they deserve it.

Look at 1 Corinthians 6, how Paul built on this idea. 1 Corinthians 6, the problem here is that there are Christians going to court against each other. Presumably, one Christian feels like he has a good case against another.

If so, it is because one is perceived to have wronged them. And Paul says, first of all, they shouldn't be going to court before unbelievers. If they have to settle differences and they're not content just to take it on the nose, they can do so before a Christian tribunal or a Christian eldership or something like that.

But he actually feels that there's a higher way to go even than that. He says in verse 7, Now, therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept the wrong? The King James Version says, Why don't you rather be defrauded? If somebody is wronging you, why don't you just let them do it? Why do you not rather let yourself be defrauded? That's where it is.

That's kind of a radical teaching. You know, sometimes people think that what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount shouldn't be applied literally. I mean, Jesus clearly did use hyperboles in a number of places.

And the idea of giving to everyone who asks you or whatever, there is some element of hyperbole in it because there are times when other scriptural principles would qualify the unthinking practice of giving to everyone who asks you. On the other hand, Paul makes it very clear that the hyperbole was not too great a hyperbole. In actual life situations where someone is being taken to court or where they had grounds to take someone else to court because they've been ripped off by someone, he says, why don't you just kind of absorb it? Why don't you just let them defraud you? Why strike back at all? If you're going to strike back, make sure you do it before a Christian tribunal.

But, you know, if you're more mature, the highest course to take is just to do what Jesus did. Just let yourself be wrong. Now, that's a key in peacemaking.

That's a key in keeping peace, is being willing to absorb an injury rather than to inflict one. Even if you have the right to inflict one. That's what turning the other cheek is about.

If someone strikes you, you have the right to strike them back, but don't. Just don't. Just absorb it.

Now, in Matthew 5, it goes on, verse 43, You have heard that it was said you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. Notice, verse 45, that you may be the sons of your Father in heaven.

Now, this is why I see a very close connection between this portion in the Sermon on the Mount and the beatitude we're talking about, the blessing of the peacemakers, for they should be called the sons of God. He's suggesting that the skill of peacemaking is a very God-like skill. And he says it requires that you love people who hurt you, that you love enemies, that you do good to those who wrong you, that you bless those who curse you and persecute you, and in so doing, you will be a lot like God.

You'll show yourselves to be the sons of God. It seems like a deliberate amplification on the very beatitude we're considering, especially by his statement that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

In other words, when the rain comes or the sun rises, it doesn't discriminate between those who are Christians and those who are not in terms of who gets blessed and who gets rain and who gets sunshine. God is just so good that even bad people benefit from his blessings. And he could, of course, intervene to keep that from happening, but he

doesn't.

He's not such a grudge-bearer that he won't do any kind things for his enemies. If you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? The implication here is that you should also greet people who are your enemies. Treat your enemies nicely because that's what God does and you will, therefore, show yourself to be sons of God.

That's also the best way to make peace. Now, you can show kindness to your enemies and they can still hate you. They can still refuse to be at peace with you.

But that kind of situation would probably be the exception. Most people who are enemies will be won over by kindness and by love. Some will not, and you shouldn't feel any guilt about your inability to win them over if you've done all you can to be a peacemaker.

Having peace requires decisions from more than one party. And if you can't get the consent of the other party, then you're not going to have peace such as you desire. But that doesn't make you any less a peacemaker if that's what all of your actions are calculated to bring about.

Now, look at James real quickly here on this point. And then we'll move on to the next Beatitudes. And, since I'm not, since I just remembered this verse, here we go.

About the wisdom from above and from below. Look at James 3, verses 13 through 18. Who is a wise and understanding person among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in meekness and wisdom.

But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast or lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above. It's earthly, sensual, demonic.

For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and everything will be there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield. These are all, you know, part of being a peacemaker when you're being gentle in your dealing with someone, when you're willing to yield to somebody else's wishes rather than standing up for your own, when you're peaceable yourself, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

Now, he says, verse 18, the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. Now, those who make peace are what? What's another name for people who make peace? Peacemakers. He's obviously reflecting on the parable, I mean, not the parable, the beatitude.

And I pointed out to you before, James is just thick with allusions to the Sermon on the Mount. In the five chapters of James, I myself have found 20, without the help of anyone

else, just comparing verse by verse, 20 different references to the Sermon on the Mount in this short epistle. Verse 18 is one of the very clear ones because in Matthew 5, 9, Jesus said, blessed are the peacemakers.

James makes reference to the peacemakers. He says, the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. Now, it's not altogether clear what is meant by the fruit of righteousness.

It could mean, it could be thinking of righteousness as fruit itself. Just like when we talk about the kingdom of Persia, we mean that Persia is the kingdom that we're talking about. The fruit of righteousness could mean the fruit that we call righteousness.

Which is, that'd be a fine way to look at it. It's also possible that the fruit of righteousness means the fruit that righteousness produces. It's not necessary to settle on which is the intended meaning here.

The obvious thing he's saying is the fruit of righteousness is a desirable thing. And he says that the fruit of righteousness is the product of people who sow the seeds of peace. It is sown in peace by those who make peace.

You get fruit by sowing seeds. You want righteousness? Well, James tells us something a little earlier in James 1, 20 about this very thing. James 1, 20 says, the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

If righteousness is what you crave, and in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. He also said, blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. This is obviously a priority.

An obsession with the Christian is righteousness. Well, James says in James 1, 20, righteousness of God is not produced by man's reactions of wrath. Sometimes the sense of getting something off your chest gives you some relief.

Sometimes a sarcastic or cynical remark against somebody that you disagree with makes you feel better about it, but it doesn't do much to remedy the situation. It's not the wrath of man that produces righteousness. It's the fruit of righteousness sown in peace by peacemakers.

Not wrathful people, but peacemakers. And therefore, righteousness itself is the product of the person going about as a peacemaker, sowing seeds that produce righteousness, which is done by those who are pursuers of peace. By the way, a scripture that would have gone well with the previous beatitude, but we didn't have time to look at it, but it goes good with this one as well, is Hebrews 12, 14.

Because here we have, in the previous beatitude, it said, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. And then this one says, Blessed are the peacemakers, they shall

be called the sons of God. Those two ideas seem to be brought together in Hebrews 12.

And in verse 14, he says, Pursue peace with all men, that's peacemakers, and holiness without which no one will see the Lord. Holiness, without which no one shall see the Lord, sounds a lot like blessed are the pure in heart, they shall see God. Holiness and purity of heart are very clearly concepts that have some relationship and meaning.

So this seems to combine both of those beatitudes in a sense. Be a peacemaker and be holy or pure in heart. And without doing so, you won't see God.

Which resembles what Jesus said about that. Okay, the last beatitude is not only a little bit longer, but it also is extended by a personal application at the end, in verses 10 through 12 of Matthew 5. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Now, James also in chapter 5 tells us to remember the prophets who've suffered whenever we're enduring suffering. Persecution, remember he said the prophets have spoken in the name of the Lord for an example of suffering, affliction and patience.

And no doubt James is echoing this particular point where Jesus said, well, when you suffer, the prophets did too, remember. Wicked people persecuted the prophets. More importantly, wicked people persecuted Jesus.

And if we are to resemble Jesus or have the character of the prophets, we can pretty much expect that the same kind of people that persecuted prophets and persecuted Jesus are going to want to persecute us. And shame on us if they don't. Because people who would persecute Jesus and who would persecute the prophets, if they don't want to persecute you, you must not have enough in common with Jesus or the prophets for them to want to take it out on you.

Now, Jesus, and other writers in the New Testament indicate that this is a normal thing. Now, he starts it out the way he starts out the other Beatitudes, in sort of a detached axiomatic statement. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

Now, at first, that goes against our grain, but we can sit back a little bit from it and detach ourselves and try to think of people who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake. We can think of Jim Elliot, we can think of the martyrs in the Roman Empire, we can think of Tyndale and Wycliffe and Luther and the guys who suffered for their conscience and their convictions. We can say, yeah, we remember them fondly.

There's a certain glory in being a martyr. Not all the guys I mentioned were martyrs, but they all suffered persecution. And some of them later inflicted persecution,

unfortunately, on other martyrs.

But the point is, most of us who have anything of the heart of God in us admire people who died as martyrs in the past. And when Jesus says, blessed are those who are persecuted, if we think about only those who are persecuted, we can easily ascend to it. Yeah, man, I mean, it's obvious.

There's a fragrance in the memory, a beloved endearment to people that we can think of who have given up their lives for the sake of their conviction. But as long as it's detached, it's easy to accept. And so in this case, Jesus brings it home.

And blessed are you when this happens to you. Now, he didn't do this with the other Beatitudes, perhaps because they're not quite as challenging to our natural self-preservation instinct and our natural desire to be coddled and loved and appreciated and congratulated and accepted and so forth. But this one, he needs to tell you that it's not only those who were persecuted for righteous sake, but you, when you are persecuted, don't forget, you're blessed too.

And the way you're supposed to react in such times is to leap for joy. Here in verse 12, it says, rejoice and be exceedingly glad. In Luke's parallel, it says, and leap for joy, which again, probably is, maybe seems like a bit of a hyperbole to leap for joy when you're being persecuted.

But even if it is a hyperbole, hyperbole means something. They are used to emphasize something and it's not ever the opposite of what they're saying. It's always the very thing they're saying.

That there is occasion for great rejoicing when you fall into persecution. Now, this is qualified, of course, in the Beatitude in verse 10, persecuted for righteousness sake. And when Jesus makes it personal to the disciples, it's when you're persecuted for my name's sake or for my sake.

Now, the prophets of the past were persecuted for righteousness sake, but the disciples of Jesus, if they're persecuted for righteousness sake, almost certainly it will be because they're persecuted for being Christians, following Jesus, for wearing the name of Jesus without shame, and taking a stand for things that are consistent with what he would take a stand for. And the blessedness comes only when you're persecuted for being true to God and true to Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, many people are persecuted for their convictions who aren't true to God.

The Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, are said to have suffered valiantly in Nazi Germany, just like we know some stories of people like Corrie ten Boom and other Christians who endured great persecutions in the Nazi era. Well, from what I've heard, the Jehovah's Witnesses were among those who stood against persecution and went to

their deaths faithfully, probably more than almost any other group. And unfortunately, they interpret this as proof that they are the right people, that they are the people who are really God's people because they've suffered so well.

And by the way, they don't shrink from being persecuted at the doorstep either. You know, I mean, one of the reasons that you don't go door to door is because of the fear of rejection. Is it not? Be honest.

Why don't you go door to door? If you really believe that this city is full of people who, if they die tonight, they're going to go to hell and there's a good chance some of them may die tonight or at least before you have a chance to talk to them, why is it you don't go knocking on their door? And knowing the terror of the Lord persuades people to become Christians. Well, if the truth were told, probably a lot of it has to do, I mean, some of it has to do with your time constraints and so forth, but I mean, you do have some free time that you don't use that way. I'm not trying to blame you.

I don't do it either. I'm not going door to door either anymore. I've done it before and I probably will do it again, but I mean, I'm not using all my time to do that.

Why? I have to say, part of it is no doubt a certain amount of fear of rejection. And Jehovah's Witnesses, they apparently overcome any fear of rejection that they have. And when they do have the door slammed in their face, it only confirms to them that they are right.

Because Jesus said, blessed are those who are persecuted, for I say, I suppose there's nothing more tragic than a person suffering persecution for what they consider to be righteous and yet going to hell for it anyway. You know? But Jesus made it clear. There's no glory in having people not want to be around you, in having people speak evil of you, or have people treat you badly just because you're obnoxious or because you're bringing in some error or because you're some kind of unpleasant person.

Peacemakers, meek, gentle people, the people who fit these attitudes are not hard people to be in the presence of unless someone is convicted by their goodness. But there are certainly people who are obnoxious, unpleasant, and then they count it as a privilege to be persecuted when in fact the persecution is coming not from righteousness but because of unpleasantness on their own part. Peter had something to say about this in a couple of places.

In 1 Peter 2, there's one of them, 1 Peter 2, beginning with verse 18, he said, Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle but also to the harsh. For this is commendable if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if when you are beaten for your faults you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer for it, if you take it patiently, this is commendable with God.

Now, he said, there's no credit to you and no commendation due you if you do something wrong and get beaten for it. If you're persecuted for your faults, there's no commendation due you for that. It's only when you do the right thing and suffer for it that you can say, well, this is acceptable before God.

Likewise, in 1 Peter 4, he says, in verse 14, by the way, a great deal of 1 Peter is given to the subject of being persecuted for righteousness sake. In fact, it's kind of the main theme of that epistle. In chapter 4, verse 14 of 1 Peter, if you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you for the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

On their part, he is blasphemed, but on your part, he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet, if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

So, Peter makes this very clear. There's a distinction between suffering as a Christian, suffering for righteousness sake, for Jesus' name's sake, on the one hand, and on the other, suffering because you've just been misbehaving and because you're not being a good Christian. Unfortunately, though, there are a lot of ill-tempered and mean-spirited people who call themselves Christians, and when they get persecuted, they think this is a great glory because they think they're being persecuted for righteousness sake.

In many cases, it's just their bad temperament that makes people not like them. If you get persecuted, you can rejoice if it's because you're not doing something wrong, if it's because you are speaking for Christ, if you are doing the thing that you're conscious before God requires, and if you're persecuted for that, well, then there's glory in it. If you're persecuted for doing something wrong, then that's a different story.

Now, verse 13, Matthew 5, 13. You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world.

A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Now, here we have two metaphors, I guess we could say, salt and light.

And this describes the role of the Christian in the world. Now, the Christian is the person that's just been described in these Beatitudes. A person who is poor in spirit, who mourns over his sin, who is meek and gentle, who hungers for righteousness and is merciful, who is pure in heart and is a peacemaker, and even though he ends up being persecuted, he still has an impact despite the persecution.

In fact, perhaps even because of the persecution, he has an impact on the society

around him. That impact is compared to salt, in one of these metaphors, and light in the other. Now, as far as the salt metaphor goes, we need to clarify something.

He says, if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? Salt, as we know it, cannot lose its savor. The taste of salt is something that's inherent in bean salt. But, in Jesus' day, they didn't have pure salt like we do.

Most of the salt they got was out of the ground or out of the sea, especially out of the ground. And, salt was usually mixed with dirt in certain measure. The less dirt, the better.

But, they would have these clods of dirt with a high density of salt, and they'd use that for salt because it was almost impossible without technology to separate the salt perfectly from the foreign elements and so forth. Now, it was possible for a substance and so forth.