

## Persecution

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

Our desire for popularity affects nearly every aspect of our lives. It forces us into doing things we don't really want to do and also avoiding doing things that will cause us conflict or ridicule.

Yet, living as Kingdom People we should expect persecution to come in the form of conflict or ridicule.

- How does Jesus describe in verses 11-12 the persecution we should expect?

- What two reasons does Jesus give for us rejoicing in this persecution?

In verses 13-16 Jesus outlines how our radical Kingdom Values will make us different. In being different, one reaction we should expect is persecution but what other reaction should we expect?

In what practical ways can you:

let your light shine before men?

rejoice in persecution?

**Pray** for courage to stand up for the truth, for situations in which you could bring peace, for the relationships in which you need to be more merciful, for authentic purity in the different areas of your life and for joy in persecution.

# 3 The Blessed Life

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7

Start by reading Matthew 5:1-10 again. This is our final week of looking at the blessings or beatitudes in our studies.

*Discussion:* Were you struck by anything new or challenging having spent the last few weeks reading, studying and listening to this familiar passage?

## Mercy, Purity, Peacemaking, Persecution

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 sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

## The Biblical Context: some thoughts

Keep in mind that within Jesus' audience were nationalists seeking a violent military victory for Israel against the Romans and others seeking a messiah who would restore Israel to glory.

- What are the values that our culture seeks?

## Mercy

*Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*

This Beatitude is about tolerance or more precisely mercy. Elsewhere in Matthew Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for not understanding the meaning of a verse from the Old Testament book of Hosea: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice"

- What is it that Jesus came to do? (Matt 9:9-13)
- Why does Jesus challenge Israel's leaders in Matthew 23:23-24?

[optional] **Read Hosea 6:4-10.** If we are to understand mercy the way Jesus did we need to learn what the words in Hosea mean.

- What is Israel's love like (Hosea 6:4-10)
- What will God's mercy be like to them? (Hosea 5:14-6:3)

### To think about:

- What is the relationship between 'love' and 'mercy'?

Jesus came to call sinners and show us mercy. If our lives are characterized by mercy and not our own achievements we will enter the Kingdom of Mercy.

- In what ways could you be more merciful?
- What would this look like at church?

## Purity

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

The word for 'pure' could also be translated as 'clean'. According to the Jewish law, those who contracted some kind of ritual or ceremonial defilement were rendered 'unclean' and unable to worship at the Temple.

## Read Matthew 15:1-20.

- What is Jesus' attitude to being clean or unclean?

The Pharisees are very skilled in being outwardly clean (Matthew 23:2-8) but Jesus says that it is those who are clean inwardly in their hearts who are blessed.

- What ways do we maintain a 'veneer of respectability'?
- Why can we as Christians be confident that we are able to approach and see God (Hebrews 10:19-22)?

## Peacemaking

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.*

This Beatitude is about peace. The word does not simply mean 'the absence of conflict' but the positive experience of wellbeing, safety and prosperity.

[optional] **Read Psalm 85.**

- What are the 'characteristics of 'peace' that God promises his people?

God makes peace with us - his enemies - by paying for our sin. He reconciles us to himself and restores our relationships with each other as well.(see Ephesians 2:14-15)

Jesus promises that those who pursue peace will be blessed, they will be called the sons of God. Those who want to be part of the kingdom of the Prince of Peace must themselves be people of peace. They must commit to 'making peace' as a general rule of life.

- How could you help your friends/family make peace with God?
- Can you think of ways you could be a peacemaker?