



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Gospel of Matthew

“The Beatitudes IV – Peace and Persecution,” Matt. 5:9-12 – TRANSCRIPT

For the Scripture reading this morning, we’re turning again to the 5th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew and reading verses 9 through 12. Matthew chapter 5 verses 9 through 12, in which we have the last of the Beatitudes which introduce the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew chapter 5 and verse 9:

“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.
Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the
kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say
all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.
Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so
persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”

May God bless this reading of his inspired word.

The last two of the Beatitudes, which introduce the Sermon on the Mount, are most interesting when considered together. Blessed are the peacemakers; blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Peace and persecution. The terms are

very difficult to put together. They confront us as opposites, and as enemies. And in fact, only one person can really put them together, and that is our Lord Jesus.

He said in the Upper Room discourse, when he was giving his last instructions to the apostles, before he went to be with his Father, “These things I have spoken unto you, that in thee, you might have peace. In the world, ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” And he puts them together again in these last two beatitudes.

“Blessed are the peacemakers”—what does he mean by that? Global disarmament? Should we engage ourselves with all of our, with all of our intent and with all of our minds and with all of our desire in the accomplishment of the SALT agreements? Does this mean that we should be constantly concerned about the trouble spots of the world, such as Angola and South Africa and other places?

“Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.” Should we go out and seek someone to badger and bedevil us, so that we can be persecuted and therefore inherit the blessing that the Lord Jesus has set forth for us, here? There’s a fine line between persecution and a persecution complex, and that leads to the common paranoia of such who are so afflicted.

This beatitude does throw water upon the idea that man is somehow going to solve all of his problems so our grandchildren can live in plenty and ease, for it seems to suggest that, for those who are genuine believers in the Lord Jesus, that we may expect to have some persecutions as long as we are here in the flesh.

One of the commentators on the Beatitudes has said, “The New Testament pours scorn on those who yearn for a life of ease.” And the Apostle Paul would have agreed with that, for he said, in 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 12 that, “All who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

So these two things are put together by the Lord, and we may expect that they are two aspects of life that belong together for all of the believers. These are the last two of

these birthmarks of the Lord’s disciples, and descriptions of true joy. And incidentally, you’ll notice as you read through these beatitudes that for the Lord Jesus, true spiritual joy surely does not consist in outward possessions or in happiness, but in the inward graces that are produced by the Holy Spirit. What we have, then, in this beautiful picture of the Beatitudes is guidance for regenerate persons in an unregenerate world. And we have the picture of a true disciple of the Lord Jesus.

Now, one does not become a believer by living up to the Beatitudes. For after all, when one comes to faith in Jesus Christ, that is the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, who through the gospel – that Christ died for sinners and was buried and rose again, brings to pass the new birth in the believer’s life – that’s the way we enter into life. But if you want to recognize a believer, then the Beatitudes form the birthmarks of true believers in the Lord Jesus.

We’ve been saying that these beatitudes were given at a specific time and that they had a specific application, that their interpretation refers to the disciples and others of the Lord Jesus, as they sought with him to tell the world in which God has placed them that the Kingdom of God was soon to come upon the earth through the King. And that what we have in the Sermon on the Mount is a description of an ethic that is to be guidance for the believers at that particular time. We’ve also said that this, of course, has application to us because all of the Scripture is written for our admonition. So the principles by which God deals with men in every age are always the same.

We’ve also suggested that there is a beautiful order in these beatitudes. In the first set of them, he has described them according to the initial experiences which we have when God works a divine work in our hearts. For example, he says, true disciples of the Lord Jesus are not self-sufficient but consciously poor in spirit. They are not self-satisfied, but they mourn because of their spiritual state. And they are not self-willed. They are meek, and thus accept the control of God in their lives. They are not self-righteous, but they hunger and thirst after the righteousness of another.

Then, in the next three of the Beatitudes, after the first four, he stresses the positive graces that characterize the true believer. Having tasted of the mercy of God, they are merciful in their dealings with others. Having received a spiritual nature, they now hate impurity and love holiness. They are the pure in heart. And having entered into the peace which Jesus Christ has made by the blood of his cross, they now wish to live in amity with all. And it’s not surprising, then, that they shall face persecution.

Let’s look, now, at the first of these beatitudes which we can call, simply, the beatitude of peace. This is the last of the beatitudes that describes the character of the Christian, for the final one does not really describe the character of the Christian. What a contrast between the beatitudes of the world, again. The Lord Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” The world says, “Blessed are the tough.” The world says, “Blessed are they who know what they want and go out and get it.”

One might even wonder if this beatitude had any application to us at all. Benjamin Franklin questioned whether peacemaking was even possible at all. He said in a letter to John Adams in 1781, “Blessed are the peacemakers is, I supposed, to be understood in the other world, for in this they are frequently cursed.” But the Lord Jesus has said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.”

There are some questions which naturally arise when we look at this beatitude, and the first one is, who are the peacemakers? Notice, he does not say “peace-lovers.” Now peace, of course, should be loved, but only if obtained righteously. Issues are to be faced, and not to be evaded.

Now, if you are as old as I am, and you think about peace, and the evasion of the righteousness that is necessary for [worldly] peace, you often think of poor Neville Chamberlain, who was a peace-lover and not a peacemaker. He returned from Munich in 1938, and his council and conference with Adolf Hitler, and said those pitiful words, “My good friends, this is the second time in our history that there has come back from Germany to Downing Street, peace with honor. I believe it is peace for our time.” That

poor man, who so loved peace, failed to realize that it only comes when one stands firm upon principles, and it wasn’t just a year or so later that we were plunged again into another world war. “Peace, if possible, but the truth at any rate,” Martin Luther said. And we must never forget that peace can be purchased at too high a price.

The Lord Jesus does not say, blessed are the peace-lovers. He says, blessed are the peacemakers, and there is a great deal of difference between them. Now I do not think that what he is saying is that a person should get up every morning and go out resolutely determined to reconcile and conciliate his fellow men, for such an attitude usually produces something like a meddler and a mischief-maker. What he’s talking about is a man whose very presence is a kind of benediction, no matter where he is, there is the aura of peace about him. Blessed are the peace-makers, not peace-lovers.

And incidentally, in the local church, there is a very, very important application of this. The Lord Jesus and his beatitude have referred not to those who are willing to have peace at any price, but he refers to those who desire to have amity in principle. And sometimes in the life of the local church, it is necessary for us in order to have true peace to face the issues. And, to even face the possibility of some unpleasantness in order that we not evade the things that lie before us. Great damage has been done in the local church down through the years because many men have not been willing to face the issues that lay before them in the local church.

It is absolutely necessary that the elders be prepared to exercise spiritual discipline. And that means that when the occasion demands it, it is necessary for the elders to speak with the saints, and enlarge those lines of approach that lead to biblical discipline. And even if unpleasantness should result, it nevertheless is a course of action that must be followed. Blessed are the peacemakers, and not the peace-lovers. And the difficulties and trials of the local church do not go away if we overlook the causes of the problem.

How is peace-making accomplished? Making the world a better place to live? I think it’s much more likely that the Lord Jesus intends this to be taken in an individual sense. He means to abstain from giving offense, and he means to abstain from taking offense. And he means, also, that it is necessary at times to intervene, scripturally, in the affairs of the saints.

The Apostle Paul said that if we see a brother overtaken in a fault, “Ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in a spirit of meekness, considering yourself, lest you should be tempted.” The first responsibility that we have, when we see a brother who appears to be walking contrary to the principles of the word of God, is not to get on the telephone, afflicted with Alexander Graham Bell-itus and call some other saint and tell them. The first responsibility when saints see other saints who are out of the will of God, is to go to them personally, and bring the matter to their attention. Ye who are spiritual, restore such an one in a spirit of meekness. And if we do not, ourselves, live on that spiritual plane, we are not the ones to initiate the biblical discipline. But biblical discipline is first personal, and then only after no response does it become a matter for the elders and finally, for the church of Jesus Christ itself.

Some believers are walking storm-centers of trouble in the local church. And peace-making is something that we must constantly engage in. It’s a very serious matter, of course, and a very touchy matter, but nevertheless, it is a necessary thing. And it’s lovely to have around the church a few peacemakers who pour oil on troubled waters.

I heard of a believer, once, who was having a discussion on spiritual gifts with some other believers, and finally, in a lull in the conversation, this believer spoke up and said, “Well, I believe that my spiritual gift is the gift of criticism.” [Laughter] And one of the other Christians said, “Well, if you have the gift of criticism, my advice to you is that you take that gift and go and bury it.” [More laughter] But I’ve never known a believer who didn’t have the gift of criticism. Most of us have that by nature, don’t we?

The greatest peacemaker, I guess, is an evangelist. The person who brings someone else to the Lord Jesus Christ, and through that personal contact brings them to the knowledge which is the conferring of peace in life. The Apostle Paul, in Romans chapter 5, has said, “And therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God.” And so I guess the greatest exhibition of peace-making is to take the gospel to our friends, and by the grace of God have the Holy Spirit bring them to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

Now he states here that the peace-makers shall be blessed, for they shall be called “the sons of God.” It’s a wonderful thing to be able to get up in the morning, having had no bad dreams of poor relationships with the Lord and with the saints. And it’s a blessed thing to be able to awaken with that lack of a fear of condemnation from our conscience, and to go off to work peaceful in the sense of a conscience that is right with God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.

Now, I wonder what the Lord Jesus means by “called” the sons of God. Does he mean that we are called the sons of God by other believers? Is it possible that what he means is that if you see a true peace-maker you’ll recognize about that peace-maker those characteristics that remind you of God himself? Often when you see children, parents, you notice the family resemblance.

The other day, I was walking out of the auditorium and into the hall, and walking down the hall there was a young boy about 10 years of age, and he was standing by himself. And as I passed by I said a few words to him, and we started to converse a little bit. And I looked, and his face was rather familiar, but I had not quite made the connection, and finally I said, “What is your name?” And he told me his name, and I recognized immediately his family name and also his father and the fatherly look about him, because the young man was a beautiful representation of his father. And it was easy to see that he had the family characteristics. Now is that what the Lord Jesus means; blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God?

That is, there’s something characteristic about a person who goes around truly making peace that reminds one of God himself and the Son of God – perhaps that’s the meaning. It may mean, blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called by others the sons of God, because they bear the family resemblance. But I’m not sure about that. I’ve been thinking a great deal about that this past week, and I’m not at all sure that we should say, they should be called *by men* the sons of God. I’m rather inclined to think that, probably, this is a reference to being identified as a son of God by God. Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God *by God*. They shall be acknowledged by him as my sons.

Now the reason I think that is because the following verses let us know that the world is not anxious to call the true disciples of the Lord Jesus “sons of God.” In fact, we read in the very next verse or two that they revile them, they persecute them, they say all manner of evil against them falsely, so I’m inclined to think that we should read this, blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called *by God* the sons of God. In other words, he shall mark them out. He shall identify them as those who are truly the family of God.

So one of the characteristics of the genuine Christian is that he is a peacemaker. Now, he doesn’t avoid the issues, but he faces the issues, and in the counsel of the Holy Spirit and in the direction of God, makes peace among the saints and among men. Now the greatest peacemaker of all is our Lord Jesus, of course, and it is through the finished work that he accomplished that we have the greatest of all reconciliations, for he has made reconciliations through the blood of the cross, the Scriptures teach. And so, the greatest work of bringing two people who are at odds together is the work of the Lord Jesus through that cross, that we who are rebellious and sinful and opposed to the will of God and fighting him – it is through that beautiful ministry of offering his blood upon the cross, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts – that we who are

unwilling are made willing that the Lord Jesus is made the reconciler of the saints to our great God.

And if you are in this audience this morning, and you have come to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit and the shedding of the blood of the cross, you yourself know as well as I that the greatest work of reconciliation is the work that the Lord Jesus has accomplished in bringing us to this saving faith that we possess in him. And it’s a wonderful thing to realize that it is all of God. And even the faith by which we have come to trust in him is itself the gift of a sovereign God who loved us before the ages began and has brought us to himself. I’ll tell you, it’s a great thing to be a Christian and to know a great sovereign God, and to know that this peace has been made.

The second beatitude is the beatitude of persecution. This is kind of a post-script to the Beatitudes. This post-script deals with treatment from the world, and in this respect, it’s a little different from the other of the beatitudes. And yet, in a sense, it is a kind of climax and crown of them. Someone has said the best part of most letters is the post-script, and if this is a true post-script to the Beatitudes, we should expect that in it we should reach the highest note in this octave of epigrams which have been called the Beatitudes.

So, “Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of the heaven.” What is persecution from the world? Why the persecution of a Christian by the world is the world’s testimony to the church’s purity. A wolf is not going to worry a painted sheep. A cat will not seize a toy mouse. The world may despise but it will not persecute a counterfeit Christian. It may scorn, but it will not burn a hypocrite. And so this persecution is a testimony to the genuineness and the reality of the Christian faith.

And if it should be that you have made profession of a faith in the Lord Jesus as a Christian, and have for a long time have claimed to belong to him, and you’ve never

known any kind of persecution, you may well have reason to doubt the genuineness of your profession of faith in the Lord Jesus, or at least the genuineness of your testimony for him. It’s impossible for us to be a Christian and not experience some form of persecution. So if you think that it is possible for you to live a lovely life and at the same time to be a genuine Christian, let me assure you that such is impossible. They who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution, so we should expect to find some form of scorn from the world.

What a different beatitude this is from the beatitude of the world: “Blessed are they who are persecuted,” Jesus said. The world says blessed are they who are popular; blessed are they who are loved; blessed are they who find fulfillment. But Jesus said, “Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of the heaven.” What kind of persecution does he refer to?

Well now, in the early days of the Christian faith, when a man became a Christian, he suffered persecution in his work immediately. He was marked out as someone who was different. And furthermore, his employer took advantage of him. He was also persecuted in his social life, and in the case of Jewish believers – of whom the church was made up in the early days of the church – in the case of the Jewish believers, they lost all relationships with their fellow Jews. They were put out of the synagogue, and that was worse than being put out of one’s family. Furthermore, they were persecuted in their religious life, therefore, and had none of the old religious life. They were also persecuted in their home life, and families were disturbed because of faith in the Lord Jesus.

That’s the kind of persecution that the early Christians underwent, and it’s the same kind of persecution that we have today. There are Christians who do have difficulty in their work because they are believers and their employer is not. There are Christians who have social problems because they have become followers of Jesus Christ, and there are Christians who have suffered persecution in their religious life, and in their own

synagogue have been cast out. And there are Christians who have had difficulty at home, because one is a Christian and another is not.

Some of the descriptions of the persecutions of the early Christians are descriptions that will make us understand what the Lord Jesus meant when he said, “Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you.” All the world knows that the early Christians were flung to the lions or burned at the stake, but those were the easy kinds of death that they had to undergo. Nero wrapped Christians in pitch and set them alight, and used them as living torches to light his gardens. He sewed them in skins of wild animals and set his hunting dogs upon them to tear them to death.

They were tortured on the rack. They were scraped with pinches. Molten lead was poured, hissing upon them. Red hot brass plates were affixed to the tenderest parts of their bodies. Their eyes were torn out. Parts of their bodies were cut off and then were roasted before their eyes. Their hands and their feet were burned while cold water was poured over them to lengthen the agony. So things were not very nice in those days. That kind of persecution was the kind of persecution that rooted out the professors from the true possessors, too. I’m not surprised that Jesus would say, blessed are those who are tortured for righteousness’ sake, for theirs the kingdom of heaven.

They were also persecuted by the slanderous rumors that were passed about concerning the Christians. They were called cannibals because, due to misunderstanding of the Lord’s Supper, “this is my body” was taken out of context and referred to the sacrificing and eating of the flesh of a child. They were accused of immoral practices because they had “love feasts,” and it was suspected that these were orgies of lust. And then, due to their views concerning the end of the age, they were thought to be political incendiaries. And finally, they were accused of destroying family relationships, because the profession of the faith often did cause division in the families.

I think, probably, the greatest exhibition of persecution occurred in the connection with the acknowledgement of Caesar as lord. As the 1st Century came to a close, it became the custom of Rome to demand political loyalty of all of the citizens of its far flung empire. And so Rome set up places throughout the ancient world where everyone was required to come once a year and they were to come and to offer a sacrifice, and they were to take a pinch of incense and they were to put it on a fire, and they were to call out, “Caesar is lord.” And so all the empire to these central places, the citizens of the empire would come. And once a year they did this.

Now Rome did not have any desire to establish a religion in which the Roman emperor would take the place of God. Of course, they were happy when an individual really did do it and really did mean, Caesar is lord, but they didn’t mind if you worshipped other gods, too. They were rather eclectic in their religion; you can worship Caesar and you can worship all your other gods as well. But the Christians, of course, they had this peculiar idea that there is only one God. And furthermore, that this one God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And consequently, that all other gods are false gods.

Now incidentally, my Christian friend, that is precisely what the Scriptures do say, and that means that you and I can never be happy when someone says, “Oh, I believe in God.” Because I – you and I – must want to ask the next question: “Well, what god do you believe in?” Oh well, I believe in God; surely I’m alright because I believe in God. What God?

God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and offered atonement for sinners – that God – or just God in general? You see, under the term, “God” we have all kinds of gods, but Christianity believes in one God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are absolutely exclusive in our faith, that there is one God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now a Christian, of course, could never come and take a piece, a pinch of incense and say, “Caesar is lord.” And so, consequently, when the time came for the Christians to offer this token of political loyalty to Rome – Rome considered it a political means by which they kept the empire united – the Christian could never do that, and as a result of it he was persecuted. He could not help but be persecuted. He must be put to death if he refused to carry out the particular form of acknowledgement of Rome’s authority. And so the Christian would come, and he could only say, “Jesus is Lord” not Caesar is lord. And so, he was persecuted.

You know, it’s a strong proof of human depravity that men’s curses and Christ’s blessings meet on the same person. It’s a most remarkable thing. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God; blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of the heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. So we have a picture of an individual against whom the world is hurling all forms of insult and reviling. They’re saying all manner of evil against that individual, and at the same time Jesus Christ stands over against that individual, and says, this man is blessed. The world says he is cursed; Jesus says he is blessed.

And if there is any greater testimony to the depravity of the world than that, I do not know what it is: that what the world calls cursed, Jesus Christ called blessed. And yet men can say, we are not really sinners after all. And so the church is that panting, huddled flock whose crime was Christ.

And incidentally, the kind of persecution that the Lord Jesus refers to, most specifically, is persecution from the religious leaders. The persecution that the apostles underwent, the persecutions that the prophets underwent, the persecution that the Lord Jesus underwent was persecution from the religious leaders.

Very often you will find that there are individuals in the world who will say, concerning Christians, he’s a good man, and we should have a good testimony from them

that are without so far as righteousness is concerned. I have not said anything about this—I thought it was so obvious to you, but the text does say, “Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.” If you’re persecuted for unrighteousness, that’s what you deserve. And, of course, when he says, “persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely,” that’s what he’s talking about. But if they say it about you truly, then that’s what you deserve. And there are lots of Christians who deserve the kind of persecution that they get. It’s God’s way of disciplining them.

But the thing that he particularly has in mind is the religious persecution. And it’s very striking that the world can be saying nice things about you, but the religious leaders are saying the most evil of things. And so the Lord Jesus says, blessed are ye when men persecute you and revile you and say all manner of evil against you falsely, because you can be good and you can be nice and you can be a law-abiding citizen, but just don’t bring up the question of Jesus Christ and our sin and the sacrifice to which we must yield obeisance.

So, this is religious persecution. And if you have been in a group of professing believers and bring up the question of Jesus Christ when the great majority are not Christians, you’ll understand exactly what I mean. Many of you have grown up in your own kind of synagogue. It may be called Methodist or Presbyterian or Baptist. Or it may be an independent church—I don’t want to single any special ones for attention, but [I] just [want] to call to your attention the various types of persecution that you may have to experience when you begin to talk about a personal relationship to the Lord Jesus among the religious people.

The cause of the blessedness. He says, “Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of the heaven.” Can pain be pleasant? Yes, it can be, because you see, they possess the kingdom. It’s often said the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, but the blood of the martyrs is also the sign of the citizens of the golden age. For when we read “theirs is the kingdom of the heavens,” we

are talking, of course, about the Messianic kingdom which is going to come to pass upon the earth, and theirs is the kingdom of the heaven.

One of the loveliest and most famous of the testimonies of the martyrs is the testimony of Polycarp. He was the aged Bishop of Smyrna. Polycarp died around the year the 110 or 12 or 17—I’ve forgotten the exact time on the spur of the moment. The mob dragged him to the tribunal of the Roman magistrate, and he was given the inevitable choice: sacrifice to the godiate of Caesar or die; say, “Caesar is lord” or die.

“Eighty and six years,” came the immortal reply, “have I served Christ, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my king who saved me?” So they brought him to the stake, and he prayed his last prayer, and someone has recorded it, “O Lord God Almighty, the Father of Thy well-beloved and ever-blessed Son, by whom we have received the knowledge of Thee, I thank Thee that Thou has graciously thought me worthy of this day and of this hour.” Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. I fully expect to see Polycarp in the Messianic kingdom of our Lord Jesus. He has demonstrated that he is a citizen of that kingdom by the way he has borne up under persecution from outside.

And then the second cause of the blessing is given us in the next verses. “Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake; rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.” Incidentally, that “great is your reward in heaven” may be a reference to the New Jerusalem, the ultimate reward that we shall have throughout all the ages of eternity, or it might be the reward of the Messianic kingdom, which right now is in heaven but shall be experienced in the kingdom of the Lord upon the earth. Great is your reward.

Rewards are most interesting. Some people find rewards distasteful to the Christian faith, and find reward out of harmony with the Christian faith. Charles Schultz, who is the author of *Peanuts*, has caught some of the world’s concept of work and

reward in his comic strips. Schroeder is playing his piano and saying, “I’m trying to learn to play all the Beethoven sonatas.”

And Lucy, who is one of the most incredible females that I have ever known [laughter], leans on the piano and replies, “Gee, if you learn to play them all, what will you win?”

And indignantly, Schroeder – she doesn’t understand anything about his music – he replies, “I won’t win anything.”

“You won’t?” she asks and disgustedly turns away, adding, “What’s the sense in doing something if you don’t win a prize?”

Now, a reward in the Christian faith is not a prize. Rewards in the Christian faith are quite different. Now, if you think for a moment, you’ll realize that there are rewards and there are rewards. There is a reward which has no natural connection with the things you do to earn it, and it’s quite foreign to the desires which ought to accompany these things. Money is not the natural reward of love. And so if a man marries a woman because she’s a wealthy woman, then what do we call that man? Well, we call him mercenary, to use a nice word. Now, marriage is the proper reward of a real love, and so when marriage takes place between two individuals who love one another, then we do not say those individuals are mercenary for desiring to be married. There are rewards, and then there are rewards.

So you see, if my aim is in marrying the woman’s money – or the man’s money – that’s not the true biblical reward. That’s mercenary. But if I desire to marry because I love, then marriage is the natural consummation of loving. And I am not mercenary, even if my wife happens to be very rich. [Laughter]

Now a general who fights and fights well in order to become a lord is mercenary. But a general who fights for victory is not mercenary. In other words, when we talk about rewards, true rewards are the activity itself in its consummation – in its natural consummation. So, in the Bible, when we talk about being given a reward, it’s not like a man who tries to marry a woman for her money, and he gets something entirely different

from that which he’s been doing. But it’s the natural consummation of everything that he has been doing. So just as marriage is the natural consummation of true love, and is the reward of true love for both of those who are involved, so Christian rewards are not something tacked on like a prize because we’ve learned all of Beethoven’s sonatas, or because we have done this or that, but because it is the natural consummation of the Christian life. And so rewards are those things that are the natural end of faithfulness in Christian life and ministry.

Well, let me conclude. There are great values in being persecuted. Those who are persecuted see great truths that others do not see. And it’s because they see certain truths that they are persecuted. Those who are persecuted are able to exalt in the company of the prophets and the Lord Jesus, the apostles and the great martyrs of the Christian faith. And then they have the joy of suffering because they are able to suffer for our Lord Jesus Christ.

John Bradford said, “Surely, if there be any way to heaven on horseback, it is by the cross.” Bishop Hannington, like Brother Stephen, marched to his death in Uganda singing “Safe in the Arms of Jesus.” And he was happy because he, like the apostles, rejoiced because that he was counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of the Lord Jesus. And he marched in the company of the one who promised, “Fear not, for when thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.” The Lord Jesus has guaranteed that those whose profession of faith in him is real and genuine, and who are willing to be persecuted for his name’s sake shall have exceeding great reward in heaven, and shall enjoy the fellowship and the company of the apostles and prophets and great saints of the church.

Now this morning, may I conclude by reminding you that one does not become a Christian by persecution. One does not become a Christian by peacemaking. One enters the Christian life through faith in the Lord Jesus, who shed his blood as a sacrifice for

sinner. And if you’re in this audience this morning, and have through the Holy Spirit been brought to some measure of conviction for your sin, then the remedy lies in that which Jesus Christ has accomplished.

And if God the Holy Spirit has so moved that you feel a sense of conviction and condemnation because of your sin, you are ready to turn and take a look at the cross through which you will find the freedom and liberty of the forgiveness of sins, deliverance from condemnation, installation in the family of God as a son and child of God, and all through that which the Lord Jesus has accomplished.

And so, if you’re sitting in the audience, and you’ve been brought that far by the Holy Spirit, I urge you to as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus to put your faith and trust in him. Come unto him and find life. Acknowledge your own sin and condemnation, and receive the gift of everlasting life. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. May God, in his sovereign grace and mercy bring you to that possession. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] We are grateful to Thee, Lord, for these great promises, these great beatitudes pronounced by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We worship Thee through him.

And O Father, as we have very lamely and weakly sought to set forth the riches of the truth, we pray that in the midst of the exposition, and the lingering thoughts of it, the Holy Spirit may bring us to the conviction of sin and condemnation and to trust in Jesus Christ and his saving work.

O Father, we pray for the young in this audience, who may not have come to Christ yet. Give them no peace nor rest until they rest in him. And for those who have for many years resisted the work of the Holy Spirit, O God, break down their resistance in effectual grace and bring them to Jesus Christ. And for those who are old and who for many, many decades have refused to come, O God, in wonderful grace, bring them to the Lord Jesus whom to know is life eternal.

“The Beatitudes V: Peace and Persecution” by S. Lewis Johnson
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Glorify the Son through the peacemaking work of the cross we do pray.

May grace, mercy and peace go with us throughout this day.

For Christ’s sake. Amen.