

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

“You’re blessed when you can show people how to co-operate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family”
The Message

Conflict is something that we know all about. Our society is so obsessed with watching, reading or hearing about a good juicy conflict that the media stokes it up, and it is just another form of entertainment. Conflict is all around us and it affects us on personal levels everyday.

Tell the group about a time that you've experienced conflict, or seen it handled badly.

Our understanding of peace is a lot like the peace we have in Northern Ireland; simply an absence of visible conflict, while sectarian attitudes still linger in our hearts. Peace in God's eyes is not just a truce with both sides still looking for subtle ways to assert their rights. In God's eyes there isn't peace until there is reconciliation. The same verb that Jesus uses in this beatitude is used by Paul to talk about what God has done for us through Jesus; that's not cheap peace! The Greek word was used of ambassadors commissioned to negotiate peace with alienated parties, a task requiring courage, effort and perseverance.

How are the previous beatitudes important when it comes to thinking about this beatitude?

What do you think it means to 'make peace'? What does it involve? Can you think of any examples in the Bible of this?

How does this beatitude reflect the heart and character of God?

Have a look at Ephesians 2.11-22, Colossians 1.15-23 and 2 Corinthians 5.11-21

REFLECT

In this beatitude the promise of being called children of God is about reflecting the character of God, our Father. He is the great reconciler and peacemaker and calls us his children to share that characteristic, making peace with each other, being reconciled. The church is the picture of God's reconciliation as people put aside ethnic and national differences, to build God's kingdom, to bring 'shalom', to flesh out God for people to see what he is like.

In what situations (in your family, among friends, in class, in church, in your community, globally...) do you need to reflect the character of your heavenly Father and make peace? How do you start that process?

Blessed are the persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

"You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

Not only that, count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens, give a cheer even! For though they don't like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And you know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble." The Message

Imagine you are in the crowd as Jesus is teaching the beatitudes. How would you expect the person who fleshes out the first seven beatitudes to be treated by others?

Why does persecution follow from the other beatitudes/why is persecution the result of 'righteous living'?
Check out John 3.19-21

There can be a temptation to think if we are being persecuted, coming up against opposition that means we are doing well as the gospel is offensive. How can we bring persecution on ourselves for the wrong reasons?
How should we respond to persecution?
(check out 2 Peter 2.11-20, 3.8-18, 4.12-19)

We may not face physical persecution, but what are some of the ways in which Christians in the UK and Ireland face persecution? For what reasons/over what issues?

Jesus promises that the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are persecuted for his sake, and for his righteousness. It sounds strange to say but what does that mean, and what are some of the 'rewards' he mentions?

How can we pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ across the world who are being persecuted for their faith (200 million Christians worldwide are undergoing persecution)?