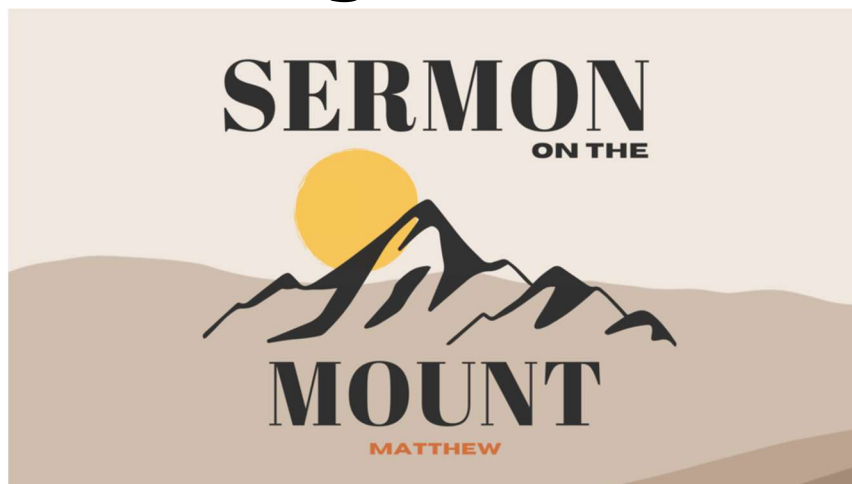


The Beatitudes: Jesus' Way of Living (Part Three)



Matthew 5:9–12
Bro Kory Cunningham

As we started this sermon series, I told you that I joined a group of guys and we did the rim to rim Trail and hiked into the Grand Canyon and back out the other side. What I didn't tell you is how many warning signs we got not to do it. My cousin Michael and I were going to go at the top of Bright Angel Trail. There was a sign there that said welcome to Bride Angel, and basically, the whole first paragraph on the sign says six hundred plus people has to get assisted out of this trail every year. One hundred and fifty plus people every year has to get airlifted out by helicopter. It's a great way to start a trailhead, right? And then it goes on telling you all the reasons why you shouldn't do this. You think you are prepared, you think you are ready because it's nice and cool up on the top here, but down at the bottom it's about a hundred and forty degrees, six thousand feet down, and then six thousand feet back up, thirty miles across. So, just in case you don't know, down is going to be relatively easy, but crossing up is going to be really, really hard and you could die, but welcome to Bride Angel! Have

a good hike, right? That's the first sign. So here we are, and we are like, should we do this? Was this smart? Were our wives right? Should we not do this? So that was where we were kind of in our heads. Then, we got to another sign that is a few steps down, and it says, "Caution. Down is optional. Up is mandatory." Again, it's warning that going down is your own choice. It's optional. You don't have to go down. But going up, it's not optional. If you go down, you have to go up. There is no other way to get out of the canyon. You have to climb back up. All those red letters are all the reasons why you shouldn't do it. So you can go down, it's your free choice, but should you? That's what they are trying to say. And then, my favorite sign that we encountered was a picture of a guy, sunburned, puking!! It's like we've warned you a few times — do you want to be this guy, because this could be you but hey, it's a great trail! Happy hiking, but you might die! Of course, we knew this because we had been prepping for about a year or so, and we watched different YouTube videos of people who have done it. Every video and every blog that we read were basically all the same — "It was harder than I expected." "Almost didn't make it." "Thought I could die." "Almost had heatstroke." "But it was totally worth it, you should do it." That was basically the summary of every blog, every video. It is harder than you think, but it's also better than you could have ever imagined, so do the work, train, lean into it, and don't take this lightly because it's unbelievable. So again, there are warnings. It is awesome but it's not for the faint of heart.

I think what Jesus is going to do as we end these Beatitudes is He is going to end them with a motivation and a warning. He is basically going to say...This is great. Do these Beatitudes. This is life in the Kingdom. This is what life looks like following after me. This is life. This is how you flourish as a human being, but it's not easy. It's hard. You might be ridiculed. You might be harassed. You might be persecuted. You might mourn. You might be poor. It's going to be hard. You might die, but come on. It's totally worth it. So, that's kind of how these Beatitudes work, and I love what Dietrich Bonhoeffer said about the Beatitudes. He wrote The Cost of Discipleship, and he was a guy who lived out true discipleship. He was killed because he opposed Hitler in World War II and really stood up for his faith and the gospel. He said, "With every Beatitude the gulf is widened

between the disciple and the people, their call to come forth from the people becomes increasingly manifest." Another one says with each Beatitude it gets a little harder and a little harder. All of a sudden, the crowd listening is eventually like, I don't know about this. Think about the Beatitudes — they start with poor, and they end with persecuted. It's like, come follow, and the crowd is like, I don't know...maybe we should just back up a little bit. And the disciples are like, yeah, let's go. Let's lean in. This is Kingdom life. This is what it means to follow Jesus. Let's do it. So it's kind of like for the crazies. Those crazy people are like I want Jesus more than anything. I want Jesus more than normal life. I want Jesus more than things. I want Jesus and His Kingdom most. With every Beatitude, it kind of widens that gap between normal and crazy. What Jesus going to say is come, because it's totally worth it.

Let's look in our Bibles at these last two Beatitudes, and then a motivation and also a warning from Jesus if you are going to actually live these things out. The Beatitudes aren't eight or nine tips for living a better life. No, they are eight or nine cross-shaped, countercultural ways to live to experience Christ in His Kingdom, and they come with a warning. We are going to read through the whole series of Beatitudes just so we hear them again.

Scripture

"And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

The first Beatitude that we are going to look at — if you are keeping count — is the seventh one. Jesus is going to talk about being a peacemaker. What does Jesus want you to do? It's to make peace. You are to be a peacemaker. Now, notice what Jesus says, "Blessed are the peace peacemakers..." Why is that? "For [or because] they shall be called sons of God." The first question is what exactly is a peacemaker? Notice that Jesus doesn't say blessed are the peaceful, or blessed are the passive. He is not saying blessed are the hippies or like peace, love, or happiness, let's just all get along. Like, why are we all upset? Why don't we just all agree that I'm right, you are right, everybody's right, let's just all have peace, let's be peaceful, let's just all agree to get along. Everybody just do what you want to do. That's not what Jesus says is a flourishing life. So, that word "blessed," can be translated fortunate, happy, or flourishing. We love that word, flourishing, as Pennington points out. So the flourishing life is one of a peacemaker, so it's not just peaceful or not passive, but peacemaking. What does that mean? Well, that that word, peacemaker, means to pursue reconciliation. It means that when you see things that that are broken, when you see two people that are odds of one another, when you see that someone is at odds with you, a peacemaker is someone who recognizes that and tries to restore, tries to reconcile, actively tries to establish peace. It is that word that the Jews love, 'shalom' in the Hebrew Old Testament. That's what Jesus is getting at. You are a shalom-maker. You are to make peace. Not just like everything's okay, but in a holistic way that you are

right with God and you are right with your neighbor. That's what we are to be. We are to be peacemakers.

Notice Jesus' example of what a peacemaker is. Sometimes, being a peacemaker means to turn the other cheek. That is what He is going to tell us in Sermon on the Mount. If somebody slaps you, you shouldn't just automatically retaliate but you should actually just turn the other cheek and let him slap you again. That's what a peacemaker is in certain situations. In other situations, being a peacemaker means flipping over tables and getting a whip and chasing people out. Well, that doesn't seem very peaceful, right? That's not like let's all get along. That seems the opposite of peace. How is peacemaking flipping over tables and running people out? Well, because there you have the temple that has people who are not acting for peace and prayer but they are turning the temple into a den of robbers — the temple that is supposed to draw the nations in, and here is a group of people who are casting the nations out and exploiting the people are coming to be made right with God. So sometimes, peacemaking means you disrupt things because they are not okay. The status quo is not good and you sense that, so your response is to go in and change things so that it will lead to a place of peace. Peacemaking is active; it is pursuit. In fact, God would talk about the prophets of the Old Testament in Jeremiah chapter 6 where they say, "peace, peace." But the problem was God said the prophets are saying, "Peace, peace when there is no peace." In other words, there is not peace they are just claiming peace.

As Christians, we can't just say everything is okay, everybody is good; we are all fine so let's just call peace when there is really not peace. No, we pursue actual shalom. We pursue peace with God and peace with one another. We are peacemakers. We actually pursue it. We pursue to bring people together, not divide. And of course, to the Jews listening to the sermon, it would have struck him a little odd because they are living under the rule of Rome. They are living under an emperor. Things are not okay. So if Jesus is this Messiah figure who is setting up shop to be this leader, they don't want peace. Do you know what they want? They want war. They want Jesus to take over the Romans. They want Him to be a military

leader so that they will have shalom their way, and that means killing all of these Romans. So when Jesus says blessed are the peacemakers, they are like, what? I thought you were like, David in some of those psalms where it's like let's go dash them. That is what they all want. They wanted Him to be war-like, but Jesus said blessed are the peacemakers. They were primed for something else than what Jesus gave them. I think that even in our culture, we are not a very peaceful culture. We are an outrage culture, right? We can see that when we look through a brief history of even just social media. When social media first came out, you posted some stuff and you got to see everybody else's stuff, and it just all kind of came out the same. But about ten years ago, they added this 'like' button. All of a sudden, everybody got a vote on whether what you said was good or not. Twitter got a retweet button. So, if you said something good, you can retweet then more people could see it. It didn't take long until the more likes and the more retweets came from things that were outrageous, things that were inciting, mean things that you wanted others to share and like. All of a sudden, we now live in a Twitter world where a lot of what gets shared and celebrated is rage. We are living in that culture, we are fueled by that culture, and Jesus says if you want to follow Him in the Kingdom be a peacemaker. You are supposed to be about reconciliation, about unity, about bridging things, listening and trying to bring everybody into a right relationship with God and each other. That is not natural in our culture, and it wasn't natural back then. They don't want reconciliation with the Romans; they want to overthrow them. But Jesus says I am bringing peace to the nations, and you, as a follower of mine, you are now a peacemaker.

So what does it mean to be a peacemaker, practically? How do we become a peacemaker, because it says we are blessed if we are, we are flourishing if we are — how do we actually do this? I want to use some imagery, so think about a thermostat. Most of you have a thermostat in your house, and you probably set it between sixty-eight and seventy-two degrees. That is where you need to set it because it just feels good. So we have a thermostat that sets the temperature of the home. I want you to think about your life — you are a thermostat. In all the various places that you enter, what is your temperature set at? In other words, when you walk into

a place, does the temperature rise? Does it get hot? Does it get cold? Or, do you bring that feeling of you are making things shalom? So, I want to think of ourselves as we are a thermostat and it's set to shalom. So, the first place that we have to have our thermostats right is our own heart. So we are going to go heart, home, work, and world, alright.

So in your own heart, is your thermostat set at Shalom? You have peace with God and peace with your neighbors in your own heart, because the good news is Paul says in Romans 5 that because of faith you now have peace with God. So if you are Christian, if you believe in the Lord Jesus, it is true that you have peace with God — no more guilt, no more shame, you have forgiveness. You don't have to have all this pent up aggression and anger. You don't have to get your way. You don't have to bite back. You don't have to retaliate. Why? Because you have peace with God. God has made peace in your heart through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. That should be your default setting. But sometimes we forget that, and we push a little button and up that thermostat to the eighties or to the nineties. I might just be driving my car and somebody pulls out in front of me, and I am like, AH! That is a you problem, not the person that pulled out problem. That is your thermostat set to ninety, and if anybody crosses your path, you are like...*oh, I'm going to get them.* That's not good. Your thermostat is really, really hot. Or, maybe it's really cold and you are like...*I don't care. Whatever.* You are good. You don't feel anything. That is because that thermostat in your heart is not at shalom, peace with God, peace with neighbor. You don't have peace; you are seeking peace. So, the first place is your relationship with God. What is the thermostat set at? Is it shalom — because now you are going to take your heart into a home.

So let's go now into your home. What is your thermostat when you walk into your house? When you walk in, do things get better or worse because you are there? That is telling you how your thermostat is. When you walk in, do the kids tense up? They don't know what to say because you might yell, or you might just flip out. Do they tiptoe around you? When you come in at ninety degrees, you don't have peace in your heart and now you are bringing that into your home. You are a peacemaker — you are supposed

to have shalom setting when you come home so that you try to make peace. You know, the thing about thermostats is not only that you set the temperature, but it actually tells you what the real temperature is, and sometimes the real temperature is different than what you set it for.

For instance, a couple days ago I went upstairs and the temperature was at eighty-seven, and it was seven o'clock at night. It was bedtime for my kids, and Evie says, "I'm sweating." "Yeah, I know, honey, it's not going to work tonight. You have to come downstairs." I could have just ignored that. I could have said, "I got it set of seventy-two. I don't know. It's just your imagination. Just go to bed, kids." That's not going to work, right, because there's a problem. There's an obvious problem. Things aren't okay. So I had to call our air conditioner guy and he had to come out and pump it full of Freon that was really overpriced, and now we can put it on seventy-two and it actually is seventy-two. Things are okay now. See, if you are a peacemaker, you don't only look at what you think it's set on but you are trying to think about what is actually going on in my family. What is actually happening in my kids' life, in my spouse's life, or my friend's life? What is the actual temperature based on what I wanted to be set on. See, sometimes when we get home after a long day and we lay in bed, we know the temperature is like really hot or really cold with our spouse. You can tell something has happened to them. Maybe it's not even you; maybe just life has happened. Something is really wrong. Well, if you are trying to be *peaceful*, it is like, that's on her, or that's on him. Netflix, click. I don't want to deal with that. I have had to deal with the whole day. I don't want to deal with her. I don't want to deal with him. I just want to watch TV and go to bed. That's all I want. But if you read the temperature, then it forces you to be a *peacemaker*, "Hey, honey. What's wrong? I can tell something's eating at you." You know, it's going to be an hour conversation and you just want to go to bed. You can be passive because you are peacemaking. In peacemaking, sometimes you have to have awkward conversations. Sometimes you have to disrupt the normal order because things aren't okay. You can see it in your kids, you can see it in your spouse, and you are not going to be passive and just want peace and Netflix and say I'm good. You want the thermostat of your home to be shalom, and when it's ninety degrees, things are not okay, when it's thirty

degrees, things are not okay. You want your whole family to experience the wholeness and fullness of God and one another. So what do you bring into your home? Is your thermostat set to shalom, and are you watching that other dial that says things aren't okay? What does a peacemaker do? You wake up. You go into that moment and you seek to make peace, to reconcile, to forgive, to love, to draw others into the glory of God. So at home, how is the thermostat? Are you setting it to shalom and making sure it's tracking? Or, are you passively ignoring and letting your home, not thrive, but flounder?

Not only at home, what happens at work? When you walk into your place of business, do you make things better or worse? When you walk in, do people run? Do you divide, or do you unify? When whatever that thing at the water cooler is being talked about and you know it's going to make some people angry, are you just going to like get into it and stir the pot because you love the juicy gossip and talk about whatever is happening? You want people to yell because you think your tribe is right, and they are all wrong. You want to yell loud enough so they know they are wrong and we are right. Your goal at work is always stirring up because you know it's going to make somebody mad and that is what you thrive on. Or, do you come into your work and try to notice people who might think differently than you do, and you try to bridge gaps? You are trying to reconcile them back to God and to one another. Are you a person that brings peace into your workplace?

So, not just your heart, not just your home, not just your work, but what about your world? When I say world, I don't mean the whole world. I mean, all of us want world peace, that sounds great, but you can't control world peace. What you can control is the peacefulness of your world. Because you have a world, you have a sphere of influence, people that you come in contact with. It may be people you spend a whole lot of time with, but maybe it's just people that you brush by that you spend limited time with. In those areas, are you going into those places to look around at how everybody is doing? Is there a problem, and if there is, how can you go into those situations and try to bridge gaps? How can you call stuff out if it needs to be called out? How can you try to bring reconciliation and healing,

and the gospel to situations so that people can have peace with God and peace with one another?

What is the thermostat of your life? Is it set to shalom because you have peace with God by faith in the Lord Jesus? You have forgiveness. You don't have guilt and shame. You don't have anything to be outraged or angry about. You have peace with God and you want to have peace with your neighbors. And then, in all those places — your home, your work, and your world — are you looking to that other dial to see if it's too hot or too cold, and as you notice that, you are not passive, you are not peaceful, but you are peacemaking? This means you enter into those situations and you try to not make them hotter or colder, but you try to restore them back to shalom because you want people have a right relationship with God and a right relationship with one another. Are you making peace in the various relationships that you have? Because Jesus says flourishing are the peacemakers.

Now, why is that so? Well, it is because Jesus says, "...for they shall be called sons of God." If you are a peacemaker, you are called a son of God. What does that mean? It means that you are in the family business, that you are doing your Father's work. You are acting like your Father; therefore, you are called a son of your Father. Because guess what? Your Father is one who is about the work of reconciliation and peacemaking. Notice what Paul says in Colossians 1:19–20. It says, "For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in Heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross." In other words, peacemaking is gospel business. What did God do through His Son, Jesus? He is reconciling all things to Himself. He is unifying, not dividing. He is reconciling, bringing parties that are opposed to one another and don't like one another together. How does that happen? By the blood of His cross. Not passive, but peacemaking. Jesus made peace and reconciliation available by His death, burial, and resurrection on the cross Jesus is saying if you want to flourish, be a peacemaker because you will be doing the work of the Father. You will be called a son of the Father. You will be in the divine family business.

You know, I have noticed when I'm working out in my shop, maybe I'm piddling on my Jeep, or I'm cutting some wood up, or trying to do a honey-do job, just doing some household work in my shop, I have noticed that Garnet and Evie Kate get boards, drag them out into the driveway, and they start hammering nails and screwing with screw guns. They try to build these weird things out of wood. But I have noticed they never do it except for when I'm working. It's a little frustrating, like where is my drill? Oh yeah, they have it! But they only do that when I'm in the shop working, and I was trying to think why is that...why don't they do that when I'm not doing what I'm doing? I think it is because they are kids that want to join their father. They are kids that want to do the work their father does. So when little G sees me sawing, he wants to get a saw and try to cut something. He wants to try to nail something. He wants to try to build something because he sees his daddy doing that. Whenever I am at work in the office and I am trying to type or write something, Evie Kate will get little sticky notes and say, "Hey, daddy. Can I draw something? Can I type a little bit?" She wants to do what I do because she wants to be a part of her dad's work.

Jesus is saying you will flourish in the Kingdom of God if you are a peacemaker. Why? Because you are doing your Father's work. You are working alongside of Him, and your version is about like the boards and nails that Evie Kate and G put together. It doesn't look that pretty, but you tried, so keep going — but you are part of your Father's work. You are called a son of God. You are in that divine work that God is doing. So, Fiona Flourish is a Kingdom kid. Join the family business of peacemaking.

Secondly, we are going to see that if we want to live out this Kingdom life, we have to live right in a wrong world. And this is really hard. As Kingdom kids, we are called to live right in a wrong world. In case you haven't noticed, the world's a little broken. We are called to live right in a broken world. We are called to live right side up in an upside-down world as we saw in our study through Acts. So what does Jesus say? Blessed are those who are persecuted. That word means run after, harassed, ridiculed. In other words, fortunate, happy, and flourishing are those who are harassed. That doesn't sound right. I don't love when I'm harassed. How many of

you think...*I got harassed today, it was great!* That doesn't quite make sense, right? How is it a blessing to be harassed? Well, it's for righteousness' sake for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. They are persecuted for righteousness' sake, and that's a really important "for" because some of us get persecuted for the wrong reason and then we think we are just Kingdom kids and this is just part of the deal. Notice Jesus doesn't say, blessed are those who are persecuted for being rude. I mean, a lot of times as Christians, the reason we are getting harassed, the reason our coworker doesn't like us, is not because we are living righteously but because we are rude! We have a lot of truth and no love. We are like, truth, truth, truth, bomb, bomb, bomb, with no love, no compassion, and no mercy, so we are getting a lot of harassment. Nobody likes us, but it's just because you are not nice. That's not what Jesus talking about...*blessed are you when you are really a mean Christian and nobody likes you.* No, that's not what He is saying. He's saying blessed are you when you are persecuted for righteousness.

Jesus is also not saying blessed are you when you are persecuted for being rebuked. See, sometimes when we get persecuted we think we are persecuted when somebody rebukes us, but it's actually not the rebuke. They are actually telling us something right. For instance, Costa Hinn wrote this article called [Benny Hinn is my uncle but I Don't Preach the Prosperity Gospel](#). It's a fantastic read. He was also on a documentary about the American Gospel, and in it he talked about living in the Hinn family and the persecution they faced. He said that as a kid growing up, when they would buy their second jet plane and their seventh vacation house, there were some people that would raise questions about if that was okay and also follow Jesus. So people would stand outside the limos calling them out for living in luxury when they are preaching a gospel message. So he would have a little conflict and then say to his uncle, "It sounds like they are telling us we shouldn't do this." He said my uncle would always respond, "Well, that's exactly what Jesus said. He said just as they persecuted me they will also persecute you, that's what Jesus was talking about. This seventh vacation house is a great thing, but they are persecuting us, so just lean into it. You will face persecution in this world. Jesus said it Himself." That is not the persecution Jesus is talking about. It is not when

you buy your eighth home and somebody raises a flag. That's not what Jesus talking about. It is also not when you are a girl and your boyfriend says, "I know people are telling you we shouldn't live together, but I want you to know that is just persecution, God is okay with this." No, that's not what Jesus is saying here. That's not persecution. That's rebuke and you need to repent. You have to notice what you are being persecuted for. Is it because you being rude or you out of step with the gospel? Those kind of things people are saying to you, you need to listen to those and repent of those. Jesus is saying blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake — for doing the right thing.

I saw a New York Times article just this week, and the headline said this: Pregnancy? Need help? They have an agenda. It was an opinion piece on how pregnancy crisis centers are actually evil because they have an agenda. They are not just trying to help you in your crisis; they are actually out to try to get you not to have an abortion. To the New York Times, that is an evil thing, a subversive thing. Then they gave the history of when Roe v. Wade was first codified into law, there was a lot of abortion clinics. But over the last fifty years, they have been steadily declining, and pregnancy care centers have been on the rise. Now, pregnancy care centers outnumber abortion clinics three to one. And what the New York Times is trying to say we have a problem. That Pregnancy Crisis Centers are really evil because what they are really trying to do is to stop abortion; therefore, we should go after them. Of course, we have seen the fallout these last few weeks. The crisis centers are under great scrutiny. There has been vandalism, there has been mocking and ridicule, and there is a concerted effort to try to go after the pro-life movement once again. This is what Jesus means when He says persecution for righteousness. That is a right thing. That is a good thing. If you work in a crisis pregnancy center and people are calling you evil because somehow that is unloving to women, you know you are standing with Jesus and it's because you love women. It's because you love the unborn that you are doing this. The persecution you feel is for righteousness' sake, therefore you are flourishing.

And not only are you flourishing, but you can know that you have the Kingdom of Heaven. There is a 'for,' a 'because.' How is this persecuting

good? It is "...because' theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." In other words, when you are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for doing what's right, when people hate you for doing what's right, then you can understand. Now, it's important that you do what's right and in line with Jesus, not just what your political party says, but what Jesus says. It's an important distinction. When you are persecuted for doing the right thing, Jesus said the reason it's a blessing is because you can know that yours is the Kingdom. In other words, when persecution comes and you are not doing it for the right reasons and for Jesus and the Kingdom, you are probably going to relent. You are probably going to just be like... *Hey, I didn't know this is going to make somebody mad. I'm going to quit.* But because you don't quit and you keep going, you can know that you are probably a Kingdom kid because you actually love Jesus more than your comfort. You love what is right more than people thinking you are right, that you are being persecuted for righteousness' sake. So, Jesus would say we have to live right in a wrong world. We have to be okay with what comes of that.

Mike Pullen takes care of our church mowing and does an awesome job. The other day I was at the church at end of our driveway and I see he is getting ready to get on the mower. He has headphones in, and when I pull up he pulls his headphones out and says, "Eight or nine?" Like what? He says it again, "Eight or nine?" I am thinking...like yards? I don't know. Feet? What are we talking about? He says, "I have read countless commentaries on Matthew. Are there eight Beatitudes or are there nine Beatitudes?" I say, "Hey, I'm still reading some stuff. I'm not sure yet." So we had a good conversation. But you might have been reading these Beatitudes and you think as well that it seems like there are eight but maybe there are nine. A lot of scholars differ on whether there are eight or whether there are nine. I'm not really sure Jesus would want us to debate that really hard. Like... *Hey, I'm giving you some things to live by. Go live by it. Don't necessarily count em and make sure you check em off.* But, are there eight or are there nine? My opinion is there are eight Beatitudes and this ninth one is a motivation and warning for anybody who dares practice them. That's what I think is going on. I think what Jesus going to end these Beatitudes with is a word to count the cost, that just in case you are

fuzzy on what He is saying, these things are hard and they could get you in trouble.

So here is a summary of the Beatitudes:

Poor in Spirit—Kingdom of Heaven

Mourn—comforted

Meek—inherit earth

Hunger—satisfied

Merciful—mercy

Pure in Heart—see God

Peacemakers—called sons

Persecuted—Kingdom of Heaven

It starts with poor and ends with persecuted. It's not a great list if I'm trying to make it in the world, right? If I'm trying to be number one, I don't know of any of those that support that. But then, you see the flip side — you do get the Kingdom of Heaven, comfort, inherit the earth, satisfied, mercy, see God, called sons, and Kingdom of Heaven. It's kind of a weird life, but it leads to a really great reward. So, I think Jesus is giving us motivation and also warning for living out these Beatitudes.

Let's just look at verse 11, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in Heaven for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." What is Jesus trying to say? He has given you these ways to live and they are not eight or nine tips to live a better life; they are eight or nine cross-shaped, countercultural ways to live under Him as King and experience the Kingdom of God and make it march forward. It's a different perspective on—you can add these to your life and things will get better. That's not going to happen. If you try to live out these Beatitudes, things might actually get worse, but you are going to experience the goodness of God and you are going to march the Kingdom forward, and friends, that's

better. That's better than just our life getting better because we want God to be manifested and magnified in our lives and what we do. So Jesus is trying to get us to see it's a warning but it's also motivation.

So, what is the warning? Well, just notice. Jesus says you are going to be reviled, persecuted, and spoken evil of. Those are three possibilities if you follow Him. To revile is to be demeaned, to be spoken ill of, to be called names. If you take what the Bible says about a lot of things and bring it into the public square, you are going to get some name calling. You are going to get called a few things. There is going to be some reviling. Now, it has to be truth in love. You can just speak truth and get reviling. That is not what Jesus was talking about, but sometimes you can actually just tell the truth in love and people will not like it. You will be reviled.

Not only will you be reviled, but you might be persecuted. That means to be harassed, to be run down, to be caught, to be pushed in, to be squeezed. You are actually persecuted. Of course, we find the followers of Jesus, especially in that first century in Rome, were a persecuted people. They experienced loss of life on a regular basis. Their first churches were underground burial tombs where they put the bodies of the martyrs beside them and then sang hymns to Jesus. They were persecuted.

Not only persecuted, but people might speak all sorts of evil against you. When you stand up for something that is right, good, and true, others would see it as wrong, immoral, and evil, and all of a sudden because you are living right and promoting the truth, now, somehow you are wrong and seen as evil. Jesus said that's part of the deal because this world is not the Kingdom that's going to last forever. There is a Kingdom that has come, and it is coming and it's the Kingdom of God. It's here, but it's still growing like a little mustard seed that is going to become a giant tree. That's what you are part of and right now, it's going to be counterculture in a lot of ways. What does Jesus say? Keep going. So, yeah, you might be reviled. You might be harassed. You might have a lot of ridicule but keep going.

You know, I told you we got a lot of warning signs on why not to hike down the canyon, but I have got to tell you, as six dudes we were like, it's fine, we are good. And I will say, some of us trained, some of us weren't

training like we should. I was one that trained a lot because I was a little fearful...like, I might get down and not get up, and that's going to be really awkward. I don't want a helicopter ride. I heard they are expensive. So, I'm training and I'm the guy that is kind of motivating the team, telling them they need to train. They were like..."I'm not sure. It's probably going to be easy." Well, July 10th changed things for our whole group. I was keeping track of this app called AllTrails. You can read about people who have actually done hikes and experienced things. There was one person who posted this, "Be careful, mileage is not correct." So, we are banking on this thing being twenty-five miles. Turns out it's like over thirty, which is a big difference when you are talking about hiking down into a canyon that is one hundred and forty degrees at the bottom. That person who posted went on to say, "It was a bittersweet end to our rim-to-rim hike because on our final day at Bright Angel turned into a rescue mission. Two folks were helicoptered out. We had to help numerous tourists who were stuck and suffering from heat exhaustion. And unfortunately, a woman passed away yesterday. Please do not make the fatal mistake. Be smart. Be trained. Prepare. Avoid the heat." When I read that, it was like, whoa! We could actually die. So I texted the group...**hey guys, I don't know what you are thinking but you actually do need to train.** At this point, we were at this crossroads of do we do this or not? There were a few days where we thought about a little bit initially, but finally, none of the guys in the group backed out, but also none of the guys in the group stood still. Everyone in the group leaned in. Those who weren't training, they got forty-pound packs and walked up and down the Murray State Football Stadium for hours a day. They started taking it seriously. They started training. We started holding each other accountable...*if we are going to do this, we gotta lean into it. This is not easy. This is hard. This is going to be work.* But everything we saw; it's going to be worth it.

That's what Jesus is saying...*Hey, I just want to warn you. It's totally worth it. I am the King of the new Kingdom. I'm better than anything in your life. My Kingdom is better than anything you can imagine, but it's not for the faint of heart.* So, if you are in the crowd thinking that you are just going to kind of work this out, you might should take a step back. As Bonhoeffer said, this is what separates the disciples from the the crowd. The disciples

say I am leaning in. Yeah, it's going to be hard but let's go. I want to do the Beatitudes because I want to experience the glory of Christ like I haven't before. I want to see His Kingdom and I want to leverage it forward.

So, Jesus is giving us a warning. You could be reviled, you could be mistreated, all kinds of things are going to happen, and He said it's falsely on His account. So, this is not your doing. You are doing what's right for the sake of Jesus and people don't like it, but Jesus says in verse 12, "Rejoice and be glad..." What? That's kind of strange, right? Hey, everybody is going to yell mean things at you, but be happy. Hey, this canyon could kill you, but take a step down and smile because it's awesome. That's what Jesus trying to say. These are going to be hard, but rejoice and be glad. How in the world can we rejoice and be glad when we are facing persecution? "...for your reward is great in Heaven..." The other side of the canyon is really good! That the reward that you are going to get from your Heavenly Father, it's better than any suffering that you could have on this planet, so take a step in and endure. Yeah, it's going to be hard. Things are going to come at you, but guess what? It's going to be worth it, totally worth it.

Notice what Jesus says last, "...for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." You are on a road that Jeremiah walked. You are on a road that Ezekiel walked. You are on a road that all the prophets before you, and guess what? They got ridiculed. They got spoken badly of. They got mistreated. They got killed. But they were walking the road of the Kingdom, and to theirs is the Kingdom. As you walk down the road you are on, and you get ridicule, harassment, and persecution because you are living out these Beatitudes — you are being poor in spirit, you are mourning, you are hungering and thirsting for righteousness, you are being a peacemaker, you are the ones who are persecuted, you are doing these things that Jesus is telling you to do, you are flourishing but also you are feeling pain — Jesus says you are not alone, just look behind you. You have a string of prophets who have gone before you and they experienced the same thing. Guess what? They will all say it's totally worth it. As Hebrew says, you have a cloud of witnesses. All the saints who have gone

before you that experienced so much worse than you, they are all saying keep going. Yeah, it hurts and it's hard and it's going to be painful, but keep going because you are going to experience things that are so much greater than things of the world.

Jesus has given a warning that if you try to live these eight out, you might be harassed for it. You might do the right thing but everybody's going to assume it's wrong because you live in a culture that's not in conformity with the image of Christ. So, why do it? Because the reward is great. You are walking that road of the Kingdom that all the travelers before you have gone on and all the travelers to come to walk down and the end of the road is better than anything we experience now. It's worth it!

So, here are all the signs — Don't do it. You might puke. You might die. You might get a helicopter out. It might not go well with you. Those are all the reasons you shouldn't. But do it. Smile. Prepare. Train. But then take a step down into this Kingdom thing because it's worth it, because the Kingdom has come. The King is here, and the Kingdom is yet to come in its fullness.