



THE HEART OF THE BELIEVER

Sunday 25 June 2022.

Scripture: Matt 5:7-12

I find it very interesting how inspiration comes to me for the sermons I write. I

may be simply moving about my home doing various things when the thought comes that enables me to start preparing a sermon. I mention this because I am about to startle you with what I am about to say.

I wonder how many of you watched the series Game of Thrones. I watched it, not over the years it was televised but, having obtained the DVD's, over about ten days during lockdowns. That was 73 episodes. It was the only marathon I have undertaken.

It was a fascinating series with great characters, both good and bad, and superb acting. There are numerous acting careers kickstarted by the series.

One of the most interesting characters was Tyrion. He was a dwarf, small in stature but high in intellect, cunning and a capacity for intrigue, all of which made up for his shortness. He was also one of the characters who survived until the end of the series.

Tyrion was despised by his father and by a sister because his birth caused the death of their mother. He ended up killing his father yet he wept when he found the corpses of his sister and a brother whom he loved. A complex character.

By now, you will be wondering what this has to do with the Beatitudes.

In his final speech in the series, Tyrion made this comment about himself. “I thought I was wise, but I was not.” This came from a man who had intrigued and plotted, believing that he knew what was and that he had the right to do all he had done. Manipulation may be clever but it is not wisdom.

Too often we all believe that we are wise but we are not. This was brought home to me personally a few weeks ago. I shared with you the story of how I had been scammed of a great deal of money. I will not go into details today.

A couple of weeks ago, while at worship in my regular church, the words of Tyrion came into my mind. I realised then how much they applied to me. And these words can apply to all of us, if we are honest with ourselves, and that we must be if we have given our hearts to Jesus – for God knows all about us. There is nowhere that we can hide from God.

Psalm 139: 7 - 10 tells us –

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

By now you are probably thinking – What has this to do with the Beatitudes?

It has to do with being wise, or having wisdom.

In the Beatitudes Jesus was teaching wisdom. It was a lesson about how to be wise in life by the word of God being handed to us by the Son of God. Perhaps 2,000 years had passed since God gave the Law to Moses at Mt Sinai. Now, from the mouth of Jesus, the Son of God, was the wise way of life being imparted to those who heard that day, and to us 2,000 years later.

I will briefly go back to the earlier Beatitudes, 1 to 6. Jesus spoke of being poor in spirit and not arrogant and full of pride. He spoke how the grieving will be comforted, and the meek, again those not filled with pride. Jesus spoke of those who seek righteousness and do not live wrongly.

Now we come to Beatitudes 7 to 10.

Let us look at them individually.

Beatitude 7: ⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Now a question: What is mercy? Mercy embraces much. It involves forgiveness, for the guilty and compassion for the suffering and the needy. Part of that may startle you.

It is easy to be merciful to those who suffer and are in need. It is hard to forgive. I know that from personal experience having taken 53 years to forgive being abused as a child. Forgiveness is a process. It is a process that cannot be given without help. I also know that from personal experience.

Jesus words about mercy are general. They do not apply to any specific matter. In fact Matthew's Gospel mentions mercy several times.

Showing mercy has its reward. If we show mercy, which includes forgiveness we will be forgiven by God. The Lord's Prayer specifies this - *Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.* Forgiveness may be particular to us, or wider to encompass all people – and that may be extremely difficult. There are people today who are still unforgiving of Germany and Japan for what happened in World War 2, and not all such people were combatants in that war.

Beatitude 8 - ⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
What does it mean to be pure in heart?

It means not being a hypocrite. It means not having a public persona as a disciple of Christ yet an inward persona that is contrary to what Jesus and God want from us. We need to go back to the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. The Pharisee boasted aloud of his goodness, forgetting the sin of pride. The publican hung his head and said, "*God help me a sinner.*" We all need to recall another phrase from the Lord's Prayer – "*Lead us not into temptation,*" which words come just before those about forgiveness.

It is very easy to fall into temptation and therefore sin, however forgiveness is there, just a prayer way – "*God help me, a sinner.*"

Beatitude 9 – ⁹ *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

Note that Jesus did not say, Blessed are the peaceful. He said, "*Blessed are the peacemakers.*" This is a call for action. The peaceful are those

who are not in conflict, The peacemakers are those who seek to bring about a situation that is not conflict; they actively seek peace.

God wants peace among humankind. We know from the Bible that peace has been absent from the world God created since the beginning. Satan brought about this situation when he tempted Adam and Eve, bringing about the first conflict recorded – that between humankind and God. Although Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, God set in motion His plan to bring humankind back to Him and this ultimately led to Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount, and a plain statement of what God wants from us.

Yet there would be more conflict and lack of peace. The first instance of that was the murder of Abel by Cain, his brother. Yet, despite that God did not kill Cain but showed him mercy.

Jesus Christ is the supreme peacemaker. His coming, his Crucifixion and His Resurrection is God's way of making peace between humankind and Himself. By accepting Jesus into our lives, and by living by what He taught us, we can live out the Gospel by seeking peace among those with whom we live. It is a hard ask for division is easy. It may only take a word, an expression on one's face, a turning away in a time of someone's need and understanding, and conflict can begin. We must all strive to avoid such and seek to bring about reconciliation when it is needed. It is a hard ask. If we can achieve such then we will be seen as children of God.

Beatitude 10 – ¹⁰ *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Jesus knew that those who chose to follow him would suffer persecution. Indeed it began with the Sanhedrin determined to destroy Jesus because His words challenged them and their status as rulers, under Roman rule, of Palestine. Caiaphas stated it in John 11:49 to 50 – *⁴⁹Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, “You know nothing at all! ⁵⁰You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.”*

This was persecution. It was necessary and it was pre-ordained by God. It was necessary for without the death of Jesus and His Resurrection there would be no redemption for any of us. God allowed Himself to be persecuted such is His love for us, for humankind, despite the on-going sinning throughout history.

And there was persecution. Saul persecuted the early followers of Jesus, starting with Stephen, the first martyr. He was a man of passion and a man of action. But God had His eyes on him and there was the incident on the road to Damascus when Saul was felled from his horse and rendered blind, hearing Jesus speak to him. Saul changed and became known as Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Perhaps you have wondered about this. Why would God choose Paul? It was because He needed someone as passionate as Paul to reach out to the Gentiles. Someone who would be unwelcome among Jews because of his history and who would take his ministry to others, who were not accepted by the Jews. There would be reconciliation but the fury of the Jews would lead to assassination attempts and his imprisonment which would ultimately take him to Rome. There he would die along, it is said

by Peter, during the Roman Emperor Nero's attack on Christians who he blamed for setting the city alight in 60AD.

There would be many persecutions of those who follow Jesus Christ and there still are today. There are regular killings of Christians in Nigeria. It is also claimed that eleven Christians are killed each day because of their faith in Jesus. There are fifty nations where the killing of Christians is commonplace.

Here is Australia, there are on-going attempts to silence the Church. Recently in a newspaper, in an article where God was mentioned His name was printed with a lower case g. Why? So those who do not accept God would not be offended and, perhaps, advertising lost – which means lower revenue.

I heard recently of a pastor who preached at Dandenong Market. He was told he could not preach in the market but could on the sidewalk outside. Soon after he was told that if he wanted to preach it would have to be on the opposite side of the road.

That is persecution. Any attempt to silence the Word of God is persecution.

Jesus was correct in warning that persecution would happen. We have the consolation that we are blessed if we are persecuted. That blessing will not stop the pain. It does mean that we have to be strong. God will make us strong. We may not be able to survive the persecution. Look at Afghanistan where the Taliban check mobile phones and kill any male who has a mention of Jesus on his phone. The families of such men are said to be forced into demeaning lives.

Persecution is not always violent. There was a lady I met some years ago who accepted Jesus. She was alone in her family. Whenever she mentioned anything to do with the Church, her mother and her sister would pull faces. That is so sad. To be mocked within one's own family because of disbelief. It is persecution, even though mild.

If we are strong; if we can overcome the persecution, we will be rewarded in heaven. We may not think that we are strong. Paul developed an ailment that he called his thorn in the flesh. He pleaded three times to God for it to be removed. In answer God said, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”*

Some people reading the Beatitudes may sneer that they are all about weakness. They are not. To live by the Beatitudes is hard and those who do may be weak in the human sense however they are strong in the eyes of God. The key word to remember is perseverance. We read in James 1: 12 – *Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*

I will end in prayer.

Everloving God, increase in us your gift of faith, that, forsaking sin and all that hinders us, we may run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen