

Upside-Down World  
The Good Life, Part 3

**Introduction:** *Leith Anderson said, I once read a story about a bicycle race in India. The object of the race was to go the shortest distance possible within a specified time. At the start of the race, everyone cued up at the line, and when the gun sounded all the bicycles, as best they could, stayed put. Racers were disqualified if they tipped over or one of their feet touched the ground. And so they would inch forward just enough to keep the bike balanced. When the time was up and another gun sounded, the person who had gone the farthest was the loser and the person closest to the starting line was the winner.*

*Imagine getting into that race and not understanding how the race works. When the race starts, you pedal as hard and fast as you possibly can. You're out of breath. You're sweating. You're delighted because the other racers are back there at the starting line. You're going to break the record. You think, This is fantastic. Don't let up. Push harder and faster and longer and stronger.*

*At last you hear the gun that ends the race, and you are delighted because you are unquestionably the winner. Except you are unquestionably the loser because you misunderstood how the race is run.*

*Jesus gives us the rules to the eternal race of life. The finish line is painted on the other side of our deaths, right in front of the throne of God himself. There you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. The winning strategy for this life and for all eternity is caring about others and not about ourselves. It is letting others go first and not pushing to the front. It is giving without the expectation of getting in return. It is to be humble, like Jesus.*

A. Jesus' opening words of His sermon describe the "good life" that He is calling His followers to embrace—certainly a different set of rules

1. Reflects a "changed direction" — *repent*
2. Seems out of place from the world's perspective

**NOTE**—This was the "Jesus Way" that was on display in the Gospels and the way we must embrace

**Francis Chan said, I don't want to be the best speaker in the world. That doesn't matter. I don't want to be the most intelligent person on the planet. That's not what I want to be known for. I want to be known for someone saying, 'Wow, he's a lot like Jesus'" (Sermon: Think Hard, Stay Humble).**

B. In Jesus' day, the call to embrace "the good life" would seem a bit counter-cultural

1. Israel was occupied and ruled by the violent Roman authorities

2. Israel experienced extreme persecution through military force and abuses of power
3. People responded to this oppression and persecution differently (Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Zealots)
4. Jesus was offering a different way of living, a way He beautifully modeled Himself, but it went against the drive for power, desire for position, and the demand to be known
5. In the final three beatitudes, Jesus would actually note that the “good life” belongs not to the one who isolates himself from all the conflict or assimilates into the chaotic culture, but to the one who jumps into the arena of conflict in order to be a peacemaker

### C. What is a peacemaker?

1. Greek Word Combo: “Eirene” (Peace) + “Poios” (Maker/Doer)
2. Peacemaker is a “boots on the ground” person making peace by bringing harmony where conflict is present
3. Peacemakers don’t avoid conflict, they jump right into the heart of it

KEY—Jesus paints a fuller and more graphic picture of the good life in these final three beatitudes, but are we willing to adopt this new way of living set forth by Jesus himself?

**Three important lessons emerge** from this description of the good life in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount:

#### I. **This life REQUIRES us to purposefully enter arenas of conflict in order to make peace**

<sup>9</sup> *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Matthew 5:9, ESV*

##### A. Don’t miss the distinct call to action here in Jesus’ words

1. Not just calling His followers to a peaceful disposition on their own
2. Though this is certainly a biblical principle

<sup>14</sup> *Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. Psalm 34:14, ESV*

3. Jesus is calling them to “make peace” or be “peacemakers”
4. The good life belongs to those who enter arenas of conflict to make peace not those who passively sit on the sidelines trying to avoid the mess

##### B. This Kingdom work—jumping into an arena of conflict—is hard and messy

1. Our natural inclination—run and avoid all conflict
2. It’s not our natural response to jump into the mess
  - a. Essenes—lived lives of isolation (not interested in the mess)

- b. Reason for our shortcomings in the area of discipleship
  - c. It's messy, hard, time-consuming, and not always immediately gratifying
  - d. So, we avoid it or pawn it off on others (i.e. class, church leaders only)
  - e. This is NOT the Kingdom way—not reflective of the “good life”
3. When it comes to “entering the mess and making peace” Jesus is the prime example
  4. Peacemakers willingly jump into arenas of conflict in order to offer those stuck in the muck and mire of life not a worldly solution but Jesus Himself who is our peace

NOTE—The good life belongs to those who are willing to jump into the mess, get their hands dirty, and offer a hurting and desperate world an answer—the answer is Jesus—and by doing this, they show themselves to belong to God’s family because they reflect His incarnate nature

## II. This life will RESULT in persecution, opposition, insults, and all kinds of hardships

*<sup>10</sup> “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup> “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Matthew 5:10-11, ESV*

NOTE—What a convincing selling point: do right and you will experience persecution

### A. Those who embrace the “good life” should expect these results and not be surprised

1. Later in Matthew, as Jesus sends out the disciples, he told them to expect such persecution and opposition

*<sup>16</sup> “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. <sup>17</sup> Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, <sup>18</sup> and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. Matthew 10:16-18, ESV*

2. This was the experience of the first century church (i.e. disciples martyred)

*<sup>12</sup> Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. 1 Peter 2:12, ESV*

*<sup>13</sup> Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, <sup>15</sup> but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup> having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. <sup>17</sup> For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. 1 Peter 3:13-17, ESV*

### 3. Entering the mess is costly

*Missionary Karen Watson counted the cost of following Jesus. That's why she left a letter with her pastor before going to Iraq. She went to provide humanitarian relief in the name of Jesus—but she was gunned down in the country she came to serve.*

*The letter began, "You're only reading this if I died." It included gracious words to family and friends, and this simple summary of following Christ: "To obey was my objective, to suffer was expected, his glory my reward."*

- a. For some, it may absolutely cost them their earthly life
- b. For others, it may cost you your reputation, your position at work, your place among a group of friends, and so on
- c. The cost may vary from person to person, but anytime we enter the arena of conflict to be peacemakers, it will cost something

#### B. We must not allow the presence of persecution and opposition to derail us from living the good life

1. Ezra/Nehemiah—started rebuilding temple/walls of Jerusalem, but when the work was opposed, they stopped
2. The presence of resistance isn't necessarily a sign of failure or the absence of God (i.e. Job)
3. Instead it could actually be a sign that you are doing the right thing
  - a. Satan's objective is to thwart, stunt, or stop the work of God
  - b. Persecution is the promised results of those who choose to embrace the Kingdom way (i.e. certainly Jesus' life reflected this reality)
  - c. Have you chosen to adopt the "good life"? Expect persecution!

#### III. This life should be marked by an attitude of REJOICING in the midst of conflict because the REWARD is worth it all

*<sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:12, ESV*

#### A. Rejoicing while in the arena of conflict may not seem like the proper response, but it's the attitude of one who chooses to follow Jesus

1. Complaining about the mess or wallowing in our sorrows and tears is the worldly attitude
2. Paul's instructions from prison to the church in Philippi experiencing some form of opposition, was a call to rejoice (Phil. 4)

B. Rejoicing is possible NOT because the persecution is enjoyable and desired but because the eternal reward is GREAT

1. *Your reward is great in heaven (v. 12)*
2. Understand that our labor, our sowing of seed, our Kingdom investment in people's lives are NOT in vain

***<sup>58</sup> Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. 1 Corinthians 15:58, ESV***

- a. May be days where you feel like you've been in the arena of conflict and NO progress has been made
  - b. Seasons where you've sown an abundance of seed and feel like nothing has taken root (i.e. I'm sure Jesus feels that way about us sometimes)
  - c. Kingdom seed is NEVER wasted seed
  - d. Maybe you feel like your life resembles opposition and hardship more than it does victory and peace, know that your daily obedience and devotion to Christ is not in vain—rejoice for the reward is great in heaven
3. Keep in mind Jesus notes the reward is great "in heaven"
- a. The ultimate reward may not be seen in the temporary, which is hard for those who desire instant gratification or want relief from current hardships
  - b. But be encouraged, the opposition, persecution, and conflict that comes with doing right and following Jesus is but temporary the reward is eternal

***<sup>16</sup> So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, ESV***

- c. The sufferings NOW won't compare to the future glory

***<sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Romans 8:18, ESV***

- d. The blessing is NOT in the suffering but in the promised outcome—an outcome that is promised in heaven BUT we do get a taste of it now (i.e. Thy Kingdom come...)

**Conclusion**—This is the way of the “good life” which was also evident through the life of the prophets who hungered for righteousness, expressed generous mercy, and followed God, yet still experienced persecution and hardship.

- Requires that you and I willfully enter into the arena of conflict to be peacemakers (messy but worth it)
- Results in a life of persecution and opposition
- But rejoicing is absolutely called for because His reward is great in heaven

*In Iran, Mehdi Dibaj, an Assemblies of God minister, spent nearly 10 years in prison for his faith. A convert from Islam in 1955, Dibaj is given every opportunity by the authorities to regain his freedom. First, he is asked to sign a paper admitting he was wrong and that he wants to return to Islam. When this fails, he is beaten, tortured, and put through mock executions. His wife succumbs to pressure, converts to Islam, and marries another man, though Dibaj's children refuse to renounce their faith.*

*Next Dibaj is offered freedom in exchange for admitting he is mentally unstable. It is only after fellow pastor Haik Hovsepian-Mehr, chairman of Iran's Protestant Council, courageously sends out an open letter to Western media publicizing Dibaj's plight that he is freed. Not long after, Haik disappears and his murdered body is found. Still, Dibaj refuses to flee and continues his pastoral ministry; soon he meets the same fate. What is the result?*

*"In 1977 there were only 2,700 evangelicals in Iran out of a population of 45 million. Of these only 300 were former Muslims. . Today, there are close to 55 thousand believers, of whom 27 thousand are from Muslim backgrounds."*