

Blessed Are the Persecuted

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[0 : 00] And if you would open up your Bibles to Matthew chapter 5, we are looking at the last beatitude together this morning. But this isn't the last sermon from the Sermon on the Mount I'm going to preach.

So I'm going to preach on blessed are the persecuted, those persecuted this morning. Next week, salt and light. The week after that, I'll get to preach on what Jesus means when he says, I came not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it.

And that'll get us ready to go for Christmas time. If you're looking at Matthew chapter 5, let me read these beatitudes, page 962 of your Pew Bible.

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain. And when he sat down, his disciples came to him. 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.

[1 : 05] 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. May God bless the reading and hearing of his word.

Well, we've come to the end of the Beatitudes. I'm a little sad. And this last Beatitude, the eighth Beatitude, stands out.

Because now what Jesus is talking about is not something that we are to be kind of an attitude in us towards God. What he's describing in this eighth Beatitude is a response to us.

[2 : 12] When we're living out the first seven Beatitudes, we can expect something in return. Persecution. If you are declaring spiritual bankruptcy on a regular basis, knowing that your debt, you can't pay it yet, but God's grace paid your debt.

If you are mourning your sin and the sin of others, if you are seeking to grow in humility and meekness, if you're hungering, thirsting after a righteousness from within, a heart righteousness, a God-pleasing righteousness.

If you're showing mercy, if you're striving to be pure in heart, even if you're making peace with others. You want the fullness of God's goodness experienced in your relationships.

Do you know what's going to happen? The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians puts it this way. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To one, a fragrance from death to death. To the other, a fragrance from life to life. Do you know what happens when you start living out the Beatitudes? You start to smell like Jesus.

[3 : 35] And for some, that fragrance of Christ is a delight. But for many others, it is repulsive. When you smell like Jesus, you will suffer like Jesus.

So, expect to be reviled. Expect to be treated unfairly, harshly. Expect to be slandered.

Because to be like Jesus is to suffer like Jesus. One would think that when you're living out the Beatitudes, that would be a welcome presence in a culture.

Doesn't it make sense? Jesus is saying, no. Not always. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

So, if you're a Christian in the room and you're a follower of Jesus. And you're experiencing some heat for being a follower of Jesus. How are you responding to that?

[4 : 44] Are you experiencing some pushback for being a follower of Jesus? Jesus tells us that it's going to happen and he tells us how to respond.

We live in a culture that is being handed over more and more to its sinful desires. It's a judgment of God. It's Romans chapter 1. And so, we can expect as followers of Jesus that resistance to us in our pursuit of the Lord is going to increase as our culture is handed over.

Are you willing to endure hardship for Jesus? Here's what I want to convince you of this morning. Kingdom citizens suffer gladly for their king.

Kingdom citizens suffer gladly for their king. And I'm going to make eight points. Sorry, you just felt persecuted. I'm going to make four points.

The remaining beatitude. Our persecution. Let's just be clear about it. Point one. Point two. Our reason for our persecution. We've got to be clear about that.

[5 : 54] Point three. Our rejoicing in our persecution. And number four. Our response to our persecutors. Are you willing to suffer gladly for Jesus?

Point number one. This remaining beatitude. Our persecution. Again, this is unique. The eighth beatitude is unique.

Jesus is talking about there's going to be a kind of reception to us in a culture. And not only must we expect a certain kind of resistance, there's a way to respond to it.

As I've been saying all along, all eight of these beatitudes, it's an eight point kind of character list. A profile of a kingdom citizen.

Anyone who's been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of the beloved son. These are to mark us in some measure. Whether that's just being avoided.

[7 : 03] Or that's martyrdom. Persecution. All the way across. Now there's some interesting features of this last beatitude.

Let me point them out to you. First, it's the last of the list. Does anybody know what the last of the fruit of the spirit is? Self-control.

Does anybody know who is the last named of all the disciples in the repeated list throughout the gospels? Judas Iscariot. They're in last position in order to emphasize them.

So that this is showing up last, it's not a coincidence. It's not an afterthought. There's also something else going on here in the beatitude. It's called an inclusio.

And so in Matthew 5.3, we read the poor. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And then in 5.10, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[8 : 08] And that phrase, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, it frames the entire beatitudes. It brings them to a close. It unites them all together. It's who we are and what we can expect of a kingdom citizen.

But it communicates emphasis. There's another piece of this that I'm not sure if you're picking up on. It's a surprise.

Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are those who are persecuted. Blessed are the peacemakers. Does that not shock you a little bit? Jesus, are you saying that as I purposely pursue the fullness of God's goodness in relationships with other people, I'm going to get heat for that?

It's a little surprising. And that surprise carries emphasis. And then there's the expansion. Of all the eight beatitudes, it's only the eighth beatitude that Jesus expands on.

In verses 11 and 12, he goes from 10, blessed are those who are persecuted, to 11, blessed are you when others revile you. He immediately applies it to the disciples listening to them.

[9 : 41] And he expands on it in order to explain it more fully. So this is what this means. It being the end of the list.

It being a book end. It being a surprise. It being an expanded explanation. What this means is that when Jesus gave the beatitudes, it wasn't like he was walking up on the mountainside.

And he said, oh, you know what, I need to just kind of drop in something about suffering. You know what, the eighth beatitude would work. No, no, this has been culminating.

It's purposeful. It's intentional that Jesus has been holding this beatitude to the last. Here's what persecution is.

It's suffering any kind of hostility. Whether it is an attitude, a word, or an action.

[10 : 43] Because of your relationship to Jesus. That's persecution. And it goes from being avoided to martyrdom.

Suffering is any kind of hostility because of your relationship to Jesus. And so what that means is, what Jesus is talking about is suffering for his sake.

Suffering because of Jesus. That this thing I am experiencing heat for, I would not experience if it weren't for Jesus in my life. Suffering.

So the eighth beatitude isn't a last minute ad. Jesus jotted down when he's going to sit down on the mountain. He's intentionally placed it where it's at.

And therefore, it carries weight. Paul says it this way in 2 Timothy 2. Anyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

[11 : 44] If you smell like Jesus, you will suffer like Jesus. If you're a Christian, that should help with your expectations a little bit.

Don't be surprised when you get pushed back. And if you're a non-Christian in the room, thinking about becoming a follower of Jesus, you can't have it both ways.

Jesus says in John 15, 18, The world hated me. It will also hate you. A servant is not greater than their master.

So, this remaining beatitude is about our persecution. Blessed are those persecuted for righteousness' sake.

To be a kingdom citizen means that you will suffer gladly for the king. The second reason is that our...

[12 : 45] The second point is our reason for our persecution. There's a really interesting relationship between verse 10 and verses 11 and 12.

It's this expansion. Let me help you to see it. In verse 10, Blessed are those who are persecuted. And then in verse 11, Blessed are you when others' expansion revile you.

That's you being insulted to your face or behind your back. And persecuted. You're treated harshly, unfairly. You're looked over at work because you're committed to doing things right. For Jesus' sake.

They utter all kinds of evil against you falsely. That is slander. And so, Jesus expands what he says in verse 10 and verse 11.

But there's also what's called a parallel. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. And then in verse 11.

[13 : 47] Blessed are you when others revile you, persecute you, utter all kinds of evil on my account. What Jesus is doing is saying, you're being persecuted for righteousness' sake is the same thing as you being suffering on my account.

But his understanding of righteousness is also kind of like dealing with being connected to him. And so, the righteousness that he's talking about is not the external righteousness of the Pharisees. It's not the man-pleasing righteousness. Look at me of the Pharisees. It's not the pride-fueling righteousness of the Pharisees.

It's not that righteousness. This is a righteousness that's internal of the heart. This is a righteousness that is God-pleasing. Jesus says later in the Sermon on the Mount, if you fast, do so in secret so that your Father in heaven will see and know.

That's the kind of righteousness he's talking about. And it generates humility. This righteousness is the result of the new covenant.

[15 : 01] This is a righteousness born of the Spirit resulting from Christ's death and resurrection. This is a righteousness from God.

So, if you're suffering hardship, let's just be clear. If you're suffering hardship as a consequence to your bad behavior, that's not suffering for Jesus.

That's just dealing with the consequences of bad behavior. Don't try to over-spiritualize something. Or, if you are suffering hostility because of your race, or your gender, or your income, or education, or the neighborhood you live in.

That hostility is wrong. But is it for Jesus? If you are being ridiculed for your political commitments, as long as other non-Christians are able to suffer with you as well, likely it's not for Jesus' sake.

Our reason for our persecution that Jesus is talking about is wrapped up in three words. On my account.

[16 : 29] If you are slandered because you're holding to a biblical sexual ethic, because you're a follower of Jesus, you're like, no, I'm sorry, I cannot agree with that position on homosexual marriage, because I'm a follower of Jesus, and you catch heat for that?

On my account. If you are catching flack for saying no to people, no, I don't believe that there are many ways to get to heaven.

Because I'm a follower of Jesus, there is only one way. There's only one name given among men by which they can be saved, and that's the name of Jesus. Salvation is found in no one else. And if you catch heat for that, on my account. If you are being avoided, you walk into a room and people are talking, they see you, and the conversation changes because you're a Christian. You're being looked over at work. You're being gossiped about because you won't lie, you won't cheat, you won't steal. Because you're a follower of Jesus, on my account.

[17 : 49] We've got to be clear that Jesus is the reason for our being persecuted. And when you start to smell like Jesus in your character and your conduct, for some, they'll be like, oh, that smells good.

For others, they will be repulsed. Kingdom citizens suffer gladly for their king.

He's the reason for our persecution. Third point, our rejoicing in our persecution. This is verse 12. Jesus makes two things clear in this beatitude and expansion.

It's that we will suffer for him. And then secondly, when we suffer for him, we are to rejoice and be glad.

He says, rejoice and be glad. When you're getting mistreated for Jesus, do you know what time it is?

[19 : 10] It's praise and worship time. When you're catching heat or see a brother or sister catching heat for Jesus, they're just trying to be faithful to him. Do you know what time it is for them?

It's praise and worship time. In Acts 16, there is this incredible story.

Paul and Silas are preaching Christ in Philippi. They're going around proclaiming Jesus, and there is this demon-possessed slave girl who's following them around.

And she keeps on making this announcement. This is what she's saying repeatedly for days. She's saying, These men are servants of the most high God who proclaim to you the way of salvation. So Paul is just trying to preach Christ, and there is this slave girl who's demon-possessed announcing this again and again and again. By the way, she's also a huge moneymaker for her masters.

[20 : 14] She's also a fortune teller. And so she is bringing in all sorts of cash for her masters. Well, finally, Paul can't take it anymore. So he rebukes the spirit in her.

The spirit departs immediately and dries up the master's revenue stream. Do you know what happens next? Those masters don't become Christians.

They grab Paul and Silas and drag them into the marketplace. They bring them before the rulers.

They set up a mock little court. They strip them and start beating them with rods.

And they just push it through. They say to a Philippian jailer, Hey, lock them up. Bring them into the inner cell.

And when they brought into the inner cell, after being beaten and humiliated, some miscarriage of justice, they're shackled with their feet, put in bonds.

[21 : 17] And in verse 25, we read this of chapter 16. It's praise and worship time. About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God.

And the prisoners were listening to them. Could you imagine? Paul on his back, feet, ankles, shackled in. Silas, join me.

How great thou art. Come on, Silas. How great thou art. How does that happen? How does that happen when you have been beaten, humiliated, a miscarriage of justice, thrown in jail, have your feet locked before you, and you are in a praise and worship session?

How does that happen, church? How can you respond that way? When you get wind of the gossip, when you sense people are avoiding you, when certain topics don't come up, how do you go the way of Paul and Silas and make that a praise and worship moment?

Well, let me give you three reasons real quick. First reason is this. It's implied in our text. On my account.

[22 : 58] In Philippians chapter 3, verse 8, Paul, while he's in prison, writes this. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith. You see, Paul's joy and glory in the midst of his suffering is the glorious Christ. How is Paul, how are they doing this?

Because they are treasuring Jesus above all else. He and Silas know that this one in whom they're suffering for, that salvation is found in no one else, that only through Christ could they have their unrighteousness forgiven and the righteousness of Christ imputed to them and made acceptable God.

That's it. They are worshiping. He's worth it. And that should put courage in your heart. That should be the stuff that makes you want to praise and worship.

[24 : 29] But there's two other reasons from this text that are explicit that I want you to point out and see. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven.

Jesus is saying, hey, when you suffer for me, rejoice and be glad for great is your reward in heaven. Notice, it's in heaven, not on earth.

It's not here and now, it's then and there. You might be asking, well, what is this reward? Is it, are we talking mansions in glory with like different amounts of rooms in them and those who suffer more get more rooms and things like that?

Well, I'm not sure. But what I can point you to is a couple other passages that may be helpful. In Hebrews chapter 11, the hall of faith, the writer of Hebrews says, these, these faithful ones, all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

For people who speak thus, make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had the opportunity to return, but as it is, they desire a better country that is a heavenly one.

[25 : 57] Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. Could it be that the great reward that Jesus is talking about is heaven?

Our heavenly homeland? where we go home? Or maybe, Revelation chapter 6, the lamb is given a scroll with seven seals, and he breaks each seal one at a time.

And when he comes to the fifth seal, we are given this scene in the heavenly throne room of God. And you know what the scene is of?

martyrs under the altar. Those who have been persecuted ultimately. They've given their life in the proclamation of Christ. And you know what they're saying?

They are saying, how long, O Lord, until you give us vengeance? But you know what I want you to see? Proximity.

[27 : 05] Where they're at. They're under the altar next to the throne. Do you know what that means? They've got great seats. They're close.

Could it be the great reward is not just heaven, but it's proximity to Jesus in glory? All of us who will be in glory will have no qualms that they were there, no matter where you're at.

But it seems that there are special places for those who suffer severely for Christ. There's a great reward. It's proximity.

It's heaven. And she could encourage you. When you're suffering for Jesus, we get to say to one another, your heavenly homeland's coming. This is light and momentary.

But there's one other thing I want you to see. It's good company. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Just think about it.

[28 : 07] Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, they all suffered. and they all suffered proclaiming the Christ to come on my account.

When we get later into Hebrews chapter 11, we read this. Verse 32. And what more shall I say? For Timewood family to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, and David, and Samuel, and the prophets. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned. They were sawn unto, a reference to Isaiah. They were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated, of whom the world was not worthy, wandering about in deserts and mountains and in dens and caves of the earth.

This is the great cloud of witnesses of 12.1. Therefore, since we're surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, we've got good company, gang. When we suffer for Jesus, we're in good company. [29 : 19] Let us also lay aside every weight in sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the ultimate example of suffering, our greatest companion of the good company, the one speaking this.

You know what we get to say to one another when we are living in close proximity to each other and we see each other catching heat for trying to be faithful to Jesus? We get to say, the glorious Christ is worth it.

There's a great reward coming. Wait on it! And you're in good company. So went the prophets proclaiming Christ. He should encourage your heart and fuel this rejoicing and being glad when you catch pushback for Jesus, when you're living out the Beatitudes, when you're smelling like Jesus, you're going to suffer like Jesus.

Kingdom citizens suffer gladly for their king. Rejoice and be glad. But how do we respond to our persecutors?

How do we respond to the people that are gossiping about us and slandering us and looking over us? How do we do that? Because I don't know about you, you're going to face one of two temptations.

[30 : 45] Temptation number one is just to put your tail between your legs and shrink back in silence. That's not of God. The other response is, you're going to take a shot at me?

Here comes the shot back. You're going to persecute me? I'm coming back with persecution. You hit me and hurt me, I hit and hurt you back.

That's not an option either. Because kingdom citizens operate by the king's code. In Matthew chapter 5, Sermon on the Mount, in verses 43 and 48, you've got to hear what your king tells you to do when you suffer for him.

Here's what he says. You've heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

so that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?

[32 : 01] Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect.

And you know what that is? Loving your neighbor for God so loved the world who were railing against him that he gave his only begotten son.

When we are suffering hardship for Jesus from other people, we pray for them. Do you know how difficult it is to keep a hard heart towards someone you're praying for?

Do you know how hard that is? when you start praying for someone who's persecuting you, you're going to start kind of realizing what they're operating out of. And you're going to be like, oh Lord, I don't know where this spite is coming from, but God, it must grieve you.

Oh God, deliver them from their hate. God, change their hearts, open their hearts to the gospel. We pray for those who persecute us.

[33 : 10] another passage if you want to look at is 1 Peter 3, 8 through 17. We suffer for Christ not only to make it a praise and worship time, because it is.

We also bless those who curse us. Luke 6, the sermon on the plain. we are to respond like Jesus to those who are persecuting us because of Jesus.

We smell like Jesus, we suffer like Jesus, and then we respond to them like Jesus. Do you see that? That's his way. I don't know about you, but that sounds extraordinary to me.

Verging on impossible. How does that happen? Well, if you're declaring spiritual bankruptcy, and you've got all of your eggs in the basket of God's grace to make you right in God's eyes, if you're mourning your sin and you're lamenting those people who are even sinfully persecuting you, if you're growing in your humility before God that you're seeing yourself as He sees you and relating to Him accordingly, if you're hungering and thirsting for this righteousness of heart by God's grace that is seeking to please God above all else, and that you're seeking to show mercy as you've been shown mercy, and to have a purity of heart to all people and to be peacemaking with them, you're going to be positioned that when you are persecuted, it is praise and worship time, and you will

