

Matthew 5:10-12 Sermon

Beloved in the Lord, as we turn back to the beatitudes 天福 again this Lord's day we turn to the last of the 8; **Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Now there are a lot of seemingly contradictory beatitudes before us. Things like **blessed are those who mourn** where, in our normal line of thinking, we wouldn't think it a good thing to be crying all the time.

But perhaps no beatitude is more contradictory to our regular line of thinking than this final one, **Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.**

The history of the church in light of persecution 迫害 is a relatively well known history. We know that there have been many times, and are many areas of the world now, where Christians suffer simply because they are Christians.

If we know our history then, we may know also that times of persecution are often used by God to greatly bless His church. He uses persecution to strengthen our faith, to break us more concretely with the sin of the world, to encourage us in our stand for the Gospel, and to bring the Gospel to others. Realizing all these things we may indeed say that God *brings blessing* through persecution. That He can use it for His good, and for the growth of His church.

But Jesus does more than this. He doesn't say simply that God will use it, but that God rewards it. **Blessed are the persecuted!** When we face persecution because of Jesus, whether it be because we won't work on the Lord's Day unless it's a work of mercy, necessity or religion, or whether we are mocked at school or home because of our faith, or whether we are outright attacked because of our testimony of Jesus Christ when we face persecution because of our faith in Jesus we are blessed.

That blessing is, in turn, a call to rejoice. It is a call to rejoice not because we enjoy pain or not because we enjoy suffering, but because we realize what this pain and suffering means – it means we are in the company of the prophets! The great warriors of God suffered, and so if God calls us to suffer for Christ it can mean but one thing – we are among the great warriors of our God!

Therefore... **Jesus calls us to rejoice in suffering for His name!**

1. Real Opposition
2. Real Reason to Rejoice
3. Real Commission which follows

1. Real Opposition

Looking at Jesus words together this afternoon from Matthew 5:10-12, we see what can often be missed in our ideas of what Christianity really is. We see that it is not, by any means, an invitation to be popular! It is not an invitation to be the coolest kid in the class, or the most sought out employee in the lunch room. In fact, becoming a Christian requires that we see just the opposite: being a Christian means facing opposition.

It shouldn't take us as a surprise (and yet so often it does)! Jesus said in John 15:19-20 **If you were of the world, the world would love its own, yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, "A servant is not greater than his master." If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.**

Jesus taught the disciples, and through them us, that opposition from the world around us is to be *expected*.

But do we, as Christians today, really face persecution? Are the words of Jesus here *really* true for *all* His followers? Certainly as we read of Christians in India or Nigeria or in Islamic nations we are well aware that many Christians face persecution. But what about us? Do we not have a significant level of freedom in this country to worship God?

To answer this question it is important we notice how Jesus not only pronounces His blessing upon the persecuted, but then takes the time to teach on just who the persecuted are.

In verse 10 Jesus speaks in general about the persecuted. It is said in the same style as all the other beatitudes, spoken not to anyone in specific, but mentioned in general, **Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

But as He goes on to teach in verse 11, things get much more personal. He turns to His disciples, He turns to the people who are following Him, and He speaks as only the Good Shepherd can to His sheep.

He does not speak in general, He does not simply mentioned great truths that have no application to life (and He never does!), but He speaks to the heart of everyone who is listening to Him – and also to us today.

He says **Blessed are YOU...blessed are you when they revile 辱骂 and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is YOUR reward in heaven...**

He is specific. He is like a shepherd leading His flock, and as He leads them He opens up the whole idea of persecution. In doing this He teaches us that persecution doesn't apply only to the times when you may be beaten or killed, or put in prison for your faith in Jesus. Persecution is also when people revile you; literally, when they speak spitefully or contemptuously of you. Blessed are you, says Jesus, when people run you down for My sake. When they speak poorly about you in the lunchroom because you live for Me.

This is important for us to see, because it helps us see how such a beatitude applies and may be seen in our lives even in a nation which still has enough remains of Christian living that outright persecution is still hidden behind a veil.

Blessed are *you* when you are the one guy on the construction crew or the one woman in the office who doesn't curse with the best of them, or doesn't join the Monday morning gossip fest. Blessed are you when others begin to make fun of you and cast little insidious comments against you around the lunch table – or make up names to spite 刁难 you and goad 刺激 you – when that is your situation, **Jesus Himself says “Blessed are you.”**

Its important to see how this may apply in our lives because as we look at this picture of Christian character in the beatitudes we need to understand that suffering and persecution *of some kind* is an inevitable part. As truly as Christians must be poor in spirit, as truly as Christians must hunger and thirst for righteousness, and as truly as Christians must be pure in heart, so surely will they also face persecution.

You see the entire list of beatitudes forms a description of the Christian man or woman. They paint a picture of what someone redeemed by Jesus looks like.

Yet while looking at the picture Jesus paints of the Christian in Matthew 5 may not lead us to think that Christians would be hated by the world, the truth is just the opposite.

As one man wrote on this passage, “The Gospel produces a life of righteousness and integrity at home, in the work place, and even at play. You wouldn't think that simple honesty could be a dangerous lifestyle...until you put it into practice on the shop floor!”

Would a loving and merciful and pure and peacemaking person really face the hatred of the world? The proof is seen in Jesus Himself.

There is no one more loving, more gentle, kind or righteous, and yet we cannot help but remember the words of His accusers, “**He saved others, He can't save Himself...He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, “I am the Son of God.”**

In John 10, after Jesus had taught the people about how He was the Good Shepherd who laid His life down for the sheep, the people took up stones to stone Him. Jesus asked in verse 32 ‘**Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of these do you stone Me?**’ **And they answered, ‘None, but because you, being a man, make Yourself God.’**

A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.

Beloved, let us not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try us. Let us not think it strange that, as a Christian, we may not be getting awards for popularity. But rather rejoice that as Christians we partake of the sufferings of Christ.

2) Real reason to rejoice

Why would anyone ever want to take the path, then, to follow Christ? Why would anyone ever be willing to suffer for the name of Jesus?

Incredibly, Jesus calls us not only to endure suffering for the cause of Christ, but to REJOICE in suffering for the name of Christ. He is not telling us simply to refuse to strike back, and He is not telling us simply to try not to be angry with other people in our hearts. Rather He is telling us to actively rejoice, and greatly rejoice because **Great is your reward in heaven.**

I don't know if you've ever read the stories of those who have died for their faith in Christ. You can find them in books like Foxe's Book of Martyrs, or, more recently Jesus Freaks or one of many others. The stories in these books on the death of men and women and even sometimes children for Christ really is remarkable. You read about Christians being burned at the stake who, in the midst of the flames, don't stop singing praises to God! We could think also of the words of martyrs like Stephen, in Acts 7, who in the midst of his stoning prayed that God would not hold the sin against those who killed them. These are tremendous stories of incredible faith, but how can this really be the case?

Jesus tells us – it is because they are focused more upon the reward in heaven than they are upon the struggles of this earth.

You see, the key to rejoicing in persecution is to never stop following the Master! Hebrews 12 tells us that Jesus, **for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame.** He endured the cross for the JOY that was set before Him.

The crowd mocked Jesus by saying “**Let God deliver Him if He delights in Him.**” Jesus cried out on the cross, having suffered the agony of the wrath of God against our sin, **My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?** And yet, in the end, the Bible tells us that when all was finished, He committed His spirit into the hands of the Father. Of the very Father who did *not* deliver Him on the cross, and not only allowed Him to suffer, but was the KEY Person in making Him suffer.

Why would Jesus do all this? The Bible tells us – He did it for the joy that was set before Him!

And the refrain is the same when we look at the lives of the saints throughout the history of the church. They are able to make great sacrifices in this life, being hated by others, turning their backs on earthly security, even going to the grave – they can make these great sacrifices because, as Hebrews 11 says, **They looked to the reward.**

Think of Abraham who went out, not knowing where he was going, and dwelt all his life in tents as a stranger in a foreign country because, Heb. 11:10 **He waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.**

Think of Moses, who esteemed the reproach – the reviling and mocking and hatred given to him because of Christ – Moses esteemed the mockery of the world for the cause of Christ to be greater riches than the treasures in Egypt for, says Hebrews 11:26, **He looked to the reward.**

The summary of these lives was given in Hebrews 11:13 **These all died in faith, not having received the promises but having seen them afar off, were assured of them [and] embraced them...**

This is the constant story of the faithful; the constant story of faith!

How do we give up esteem and popularity and honour and appreciation *now*? How can we go through day after day of ridicule – which some experience? How do we press on should great persecution break out in front of our door? How do we endure when students at school, even in Christian schools, may mock our faith, and mock our desire to live for GOD?

Jesus tells us – look to the reward! Remember that God on high rewards those who seek Him. You will be filled, you will be comforted, you will be called sons and daughters of God.

The promise here is multifold多样 – the only beatitude which is surrounded by more than one promise! First we are told that those who are persecuted for righteousness sake **obtain** the kingdom of heaven! **But then Jesus goes on even more to say** great is your reward in heaven.

The promise of the kingdom of heaven is the same promise attached to the first beatitude in verse 3, and also the last beatitude in verse 10. Because it comes both first and last, many notice that this twin blessing of the kingdom of heaven acts like the covers of a book, and everything between them is included in what that kingdom of heaven will be like. There will be comfort and joy and satisfaction in righteousness and mercy and ownership as God calls us His children, and joy and peace that passes understanding – a life that is better by far.

And wonderfully Jesus does not say that theirs **will be the kingdom of God**, but He says **Theirs IS the kingdom of God**. It is theirs NOW. It belongs to you, TODAY, and yet **your reward in heaven is great**. Are you willing to suffer for the cause of Christ – then Jesus says these blessings then are yours! It is all the gift of God. You need not wait for comfort, you can find it today as a follower of Jesus Christ!

Brothers and sisters, let us make no mistake. God asks a lot from His people. Jesus demands a lot from His followers. He demands that they suffer for Him, He demands they be willing to be hated for Him, He even demands that they must be willing to die for Him.

But He never asks you to give up ANYTHING where He doesn't plan to give back something of FAR greater value.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

3) Real Commission which follows

...let us be willing to suffer for Christ

With all this being said, what now is the final point? The final point is this: because of Christ, because of what He has done, because of the sacrifice He has made, because of the victory He has won, and because of the promise He gives to you today, let us go out in our lives willing to suffer for the cause of Christ.

We should not go forward ready to suffer for our particular views on politics, and we certainly shouldn't go out of here ready to suffer merely the consequences of our own foolish moves, or selfish actions that really deserve suffering. Rather we go out willing to suffer and to be ridiculed for **righteousness**. For **Christ**.

This can mean making tough calls at our jobs, or in our schools, or even in our homes. It can mean living with an integrity and dedication to God that others simply will not accept – that perhaps even friends will ridicule and mock.

Be willing to break the mold to live for Jesus Christ. Be willing to rejoice *exceedingly* when the co-worker says nasty肮脏的things because of your love for Jesus Christ, or when you are the butt借口的 of jokes because you live a life of integrity and holiness.

Be willing for no other reason than that Jesus has called you blessed, and that He has promised that those who are willing to suffer abuse today, for Him, shall have great and abounding rewards in heaven. Amen.