

In Jesus' Name

Beatitudes – Blessed are the Persecuted – Matthew 5:10-12

“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”
Matthew 5:10-12

Movies are hard to handle when the finish is what nobody expected.

There have been a few movies that get you sucked in and then at the end something happens that was completely unexpected. It throws you for a loop and then you think through the movie to see if there was anything that could have helped you guess the ending.

I think these beatitudes are a lot like that.

“Blessed are those who have been persecuted.”

This is not quite the ending I would have imagined. I pictured something more like the last chapter of Revelation where we can catch a glimpse of the glories of heaven. Jesus had something else in mind. The path to happiness comes to persecution.

How you ever made fun of someone because they were happy? Why did you do it?

We have all had times where a friend is “on cloud nine”. They are so happy and excited and they want the world to know. Sometimes I am tempted to try and burst their bubble of happy thoughts and bring them back down to earth. Call it what you will, but it boils down to jealousy and self-centeredness.

What does our world have against being happy?

Why does the road to happiness lead to persecution?

Many of us would like to think we are being persecuted. If the cable goes out or the dog makes a mess on the carpet, we think it is persecution. You may think that when the car breaks down that it is persecution, but it is really because you neglected to pay attention to the “Check Engine” light that has been flashing for months.

Jesus qualifies the persecution when He says it is because of righteousness and because of Him. The persecution He speaks of is like the saints of old who were burned at the stake or thrown to the lions simply because they claimed to be Christian. There were others who were beaten and mutilated simply because they would not stop preaching the gospel. The word persecuted has a sense of to be followed or pursued with the intent to cause suffering, and in this context it is because of Christ.

“Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”
2 Timothy 3:12

Who is a Bible character that suffered persecution in the Old Testament?

Paul tells Timothy that everyone who lives a godly life will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12). He also tells a church they should not be surprised because persecution is a part of the Christian life (1 Thessalonians 3:3-4). Jesus says that a person is either for Him or against Him. This is what brings the persecution. The world and Satan are opposed to everything that seeks to glorify God and live righteously. Anyone who would join in worship to God will be seen as enemies of the world.

There is a way to escape persecution. This is to stop being Christian and love the world, but the very nature of this passage says you will not be happy.

Happy are those who are persecuted.

Those who are persecuted will suffer insults, lies, and all kinds of evils. This will not be a continual persecution, but Jesus does say “whenever”. It is the idea that as the believer continues to live a righteous life he will cross paths with those who will despise righteousness and persecute him. It is not as much the individual but the righteousness that people attack because it exposes their own sin.

Jesus understands this is a hard concept to grasp, and continues to explain that attitude we are to have in persecution. He says that we should rejoice and be glad.

Why is it often hard to rejoice in persecution? What are some responses that we have instead of rejoicing?

Jesus helps us to see that we are not rejoicing for the persecution as much as we are rejoicing for the reason of the persecution. Remember, the reason is because God’s righteousness is being seen through you. As a result, Jesus explains that there will be a reward in heaven. There is a time issue here. The persecution is only temporary, but the heavenly reward is eternal.

Also, there is the aspect that we are not alone in our persecution. Jesus explains that the prophets before us endured persecution as well. You are not a lonely sufferer for God, but a child in the midst of many who have suffered for the Savior. There is encouragement in company.

In the end, there is the blessing of those who are persecuted gaining the kingdom of heaven. Live righteously and take the persecution of the ungodly in stride because in the end, you will be given the kingdom of heaven.

How can seeing the end result help endure the present persecution?

“...So that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.”
1 Thessalonians 3:3-4

One final note, did you notice that Jesus spent a little more time on this one? It is almost as if we needed the extra encouragement. It is as if Jesus wanted to let us know that He is there and knows what it is like to be in the midst of the persecution. It is an “I’ve been there, done that, and you can do it too” attitude.

Peter said it this way, “For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, for you to follow in His steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

I am ready to follow. Are you?

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

