

We come this week to the final of eight beatitudes—one that may, in many ways, seem out of place in light of the other seven—if a man is poor in spirit, mournful, meek, merciful, pure in heart, and a peacemaker—you would hardly think he would be persecuted—wouldn't you think that such a person would be appreciated and welcomed wherever he went—don't you think such a person might win the Noble Peace Prize—or be on the cover of Time as one of the years most beloved and influential people—but no this is not what we find, for far from esteeming them they persecute them—but such treatment ought to surprise us for how did they treat the meekest, most merciful, purist peacemaker that ever walked on this earth but with lies, beatings, and crucifixion...

Now I want to attempt something this morning that I normally would be against trying—that is, I want to cover three verses (vv10-12)—and the reason for this is very simple—verse 10 is the final beatitude upon which vv11-12 are a commentary—in other words vv11-12 are an elaboration or expansion upon what was said in v10—thus I want to directly consider v10, dipping into vv11-12 when appropriate...

- I. The Nature of Persecution—“blessed are those who are persecuted...”
- II. The Causes of Persecution—“for righteousness' sake...”
- III. The Blessings of Persecution—“for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...”

I. The Nature of Persecution—“blessed are those who are persecuted...”

1. Here I want to ascertain what our Savior refers to by the term “persecution”—the Greek word literally means—“to put to flight or pursue...”
2. It is an aggressive word—a word that brings to mind the imagery of a hunter pursuing his prey—expending great effort and personal energy...
3. Thus it refers to the purposed mistreatment of another—the intentional harassing, troubling, or mistreating of others...
4. But we are not left to speculate what our Savior refers to by persecution, for Luke has given us a fuller account of our Savior's words...
5. Lk.6:22—“blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake...”
6. Notice here our Savior defines what he meant by—“blessed are those who are persecuted...”—notice three things—[1] there is intensified hatred...
7. V22—“blessed are you when men hate you...”—literally—when men pursue you with hatred, or manifest their hatred toward you...
8. Such abhorrence often results in physical abuse and mistreatment—physical beatings, imprisonment, and martyrdom...
9. And make no mistake about it, the Scriptures are replete with examples of it, Matt.23:37—“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her...”
10. It has been rightly said—that persecution is the soil out which the church grows—Luther defined a Christian as—“the crucified ones...”
11. In fact dear ones, there are thousands of Christians this very minute who are undergoing this form of persecution...
12. China, Russia, and various middle-eastern countries, are stages upon which Christians are imprisoned, beaten, and killed...
13. Notice [2] social avoidance—“and when they exclude you...”—which refers to believing Jews being excluded from the synagogue by unbelieving Jews...
14. Within first century Jewish society—to be excluded from the synagogue meant exclusion from societal as well as family acceptance...
15. But my dear brethren, such banishment did not end with first century Jewish society—for follows of Christ are still excluded by family and friends...
16. For example, maybe the other children within the neighborhood avoid you because your “strange” and go to church...

17. Because you don't want to act in a way that disobeys your parents and dishonors God—"blessed are you...when they exclude you..."
18. Notice [3] verbal abuse and slander—"and revile, you, and cast out your name as evil..."—that is—they will insult you verbally and slander you...
19. This again had a unique fulfillment in the first century church—where Christians were maligned as social zealots, promoters of incest, and cannibals...
20. The apostle described such persecution in 1Cor.4:12-13—"being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; 13 being defamed, we answer kindly..."
21. My friends, to be a Christian is to become a target for the slander, lies, and reproach, of godless and jealous people...
22. This point of course can be illustrated further through the Psalms—if the book of Psalms is a generic description of Christian experience—then it's the general experience of Christians to know verbal persecution...
23. For example, Ps.31:15—"deliver me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me...let the wicked be ashamed...let the lying lips be put to silence, which speak insolent things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous..."
24. Ps.109:1-3—"do not keep silent, O God of my praise! For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful have opened against me; they have spoken against me with a lying tongue. They have also surrounded me with words of hatred, and fought against me without a cause..."

II. The Causes of Persecution—"for righteousness' sake..."

1. It has to be made very clear that the persecution our Savior speaks of, is for a specific reason—"blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake..."—or, for the sake or cause of righteousness...
2. By "righteousness" our Savior refers to the practical righteousness of a holy and consecrated life—a life characterized by obedience to the righteous commandments of God...
3. Isa.51:7—"Listen to me, you who know righteousness, you people in whose heart is my law; do not fear the reproach of men, nor be afraid of their insults..."
4. Notice [a] to know righteousness is to have God's law in your heart—this is to say—they love righteousness and thus live righteously...
5. Notice [b] to know and love righteousness is to invoke the reproach and insults of men—the two necessarily go together...
6. Our Savior adds a second related reason at the end of v11—"blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake..."
7. That is—persecution will come upon those who live righteously because of Christ—they are persecuted both for righteousness and for Christ' sake...
8. These two must never be separated from one another, 2Tim.3:12—"yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution..."
9. Notice—"all who desire to live godly [that is righteous] in Christ Jesus [that is union and identification with Him] will suffer persecution..."
10. Now this is a very important qualification—people are rarely persecuted because they do good to and for others...
11. But when you seek to live rightly or godly in and because of Christ—when you attempt to live rightly as defined by Christ—then you will suffer persecution...
12. Andrew Fuller—"If Christians were content with doing justly and loving mercy, and would cease walking humbly with God, they might go through the world, not only in peace, but with applause; but he that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution..."
13. William Hendriksen—"The persecution to which Jesus refers does not spring from purely social, racial, economic, or political causes, but is rooted in religion. It is distinctly a persecution 'for righteousness' sake.' It is because the men to whom reference is made wish to be and to live in harmony with God's holy will that they endure persecution..."
14. But to be specific, I want to suggest two overarching and summary reasons behind the persecution of God's people...

15. Notice [1] because natural man hates Christ—I don't know any other way to put it—the world persecutes Christians because it hates Christ...
16. Let me put it this way—enmity towards God is the fuel that drives the persecution that God's people experience...
17. Jn.15:18-20—“if the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its won. 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. If they keep my word, they will keep yours also...”
18. Why does the world hate us—but because it hated Christ before us—that is—the world's hatred for us is evidence of its hatred for God...
19. Because the world is unable to get its hands upon God, it takes out its hatred upon His children who bear His image...
20. Why does the world hate us—but because we are no longer a part of it—we have been chosen or saved out of it—and now belong to another...
21. Thus because native man hates Christ he hates all who belong to Christ—because he hates the Head he of necessity hates the body...
22. Notice [2] because righteousness exposes sin—Christians are persecuted for righteousness' sake because righteousness exposes unrighteousness...
23. Nobody is ever persecuted for regulating their homes in a strict and moral manner—as long as your standards end at your door, nobody will ever be upset...
24. But when you begin to define your standards as being God's standards—and when you begin to imply that these standards are universal and binding to all—then persecution will come...
25. Jn.7:7—“the world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil...”—how did our Savior testify to the evil works of the world—by His words and works...
26. For example—lets say a young couple gets married and begins to have children—let's say they five children over 10 years...
27. Now the father of this family may have relatives who are roughly his age—and who are also married—but instead of having children she wanted to pursue her career...
28. And so when day they are talking and they ask the wife—why did you chose to have kids and stay home to rear them instead of pursuing a career outside the home...
29. Now if she answers—well I think it's up to the lady to make that decision—for me, we wanted to have kids—but what's right for me isn't necessarily right for all...
30. Such a response as this probably wont solicit any persecution—but if she responded by saying—I chose to stay home because the Scriptures teach...
31. Now this will of necessity solicit some form of persecution if its in just a very awkward moment—you see what she has done—she has exposed sin...
32. Jn.3:19-21—“and this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 "But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God...”

Obs.1—Christian persecution is universal

1. By this I mean—it is a universal experience amongst the people of God—all Christians to some degree experience persecution...
2. Notice again Matt.5:12—“rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you...”
3. In other words—this is nothing new—the righteous have been persecuted by the wicked from the very beginning...
4. Where does persecution begin in the Bible—who was the first person who was persecuted for righteousness' sake...
5. Well let me answer that question with another question—who was the first clearly converted person in the history of redemption...

6. Abel—Abel was the first clearly converted man in the entire Bible [whether or not Adam and Eve were saved is a matter of debate—personally I believe so but that another issue]...
7. Thus when the apostle begins in Hebrews 11 to list the righteous—who does he begin with but Abel, Heb.11:4—“by faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain...”
8. Why did Cain persecute Abel, 1Jn.3:12—“do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous...”
9. Thus from righteous Abel right up the present time—all Christians, to some degree, know something of this world's hatred...
10. Lk.6:23—“rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers did to the prophets (v26) woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets...”
11. In both of these verses our Savior is referring to the ancestors of the Jews of His day—their fathers persecuted the true prophets (v23) and praised the false prophets (v26)...
12. Now there a few things that must be stated at the outset concerning these words—[1] they have a peculiar reference to ministers of the gospel...
13. We must remember that the Sermon on the Mount [while having application to every Christian] was initially spoken to the 12 apostles...
14. For it would be in them that the ministry of the prophets would be continued—they would have the formal charge to proclaim His word...
15. Thus the reason why ministers endure a severer persecution is because they have the responsibility to preach the gospel of God...
16. But to the degree that a housewife preaches the gospel with her lips and life—she too will endure and experience the hatred of the world...
17. But my point in turning you to this passage is for you to notice that all Christians [and especially all ministers] will be spoken against...
18. V26—“woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets...”—that is, the Jews in the olden days liked the teaching of the false prophets...
19. Thus our Savior places a cursing upon the minister who is spoken well by everyone and knows no degree of persecution...
20. But a [2] thing I want you to notice is that the persecution here referred to is largely from the unconverted religious...
21. My brethren let put this as plain as I can—throughout the history of the church the largest single source of persecution has arisen from the unconverted religious...
22. I've been a Christian now for 14 years—and do you know who has been the largest source of persecution for me—professing Christians...

Obs.2—Christian persecution is underserved

1. Notice again v11—“blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake...”
2. Oh my dear brethren, we must be clear on this—our Savior is not pronouncing a blessing on every person who undergoes mistreatment...
3. Pink—“They who are morose [gloomy], haughty, selfish, or evil-speaking, have no right to seek comfort from this beatitude when people retaliate against them...”
4. But our Savior refers to those who are persecuted wrongfully—who are slandered and maligned falsely and without cause...
5. Ps.69:4—“those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; they are mighty who would destroy me, being my enemies wrongfully...”
6. This as most of you know is a Messianic Psalm that described the suffering of our Savior—notice He was hated without a cause by those who were wrongfully His enemies...
7. My friends, there was never a man more meek, merciful, pure, and peaceable than our Savior—and yet, never was their man more hated...
8. 1Pet.4:14-16—“If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. 15 But let none of

you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. 16 Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter..."

9. Notice [1] vv14, 16 underscore that suffering for the name of Christ is a means to glorify God and should be rejoiced in...
10. Notice [2] v15 refers to a another type of suffering which is not an occasion for rejoicing but shame, v15—"but let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters..."
11. Thus we mustn't confuse our Savior's teaching as to imply, that every kind of suffering or persecution is blessed...
12. Sometimes we bring it upon ourselves for our own folly and lack of prudence—we speak the truth in a combative way or else give the appearance of a self-righteous demeanor...
13. Martyn Lloyd-Jones—"Let us be clear about this. We can bring endless suffering upon ourselves, we can create difficulties for ourselves which our quite unnecessary, because we have some rather foolish notion of witnessing and testifying, or because, in a spirit of self-righteousness, we really do call it down on our own heads. We are often so foolish in these matters. We are slow to realize the difference between prejudice and principle; and we are so slow to understand the difference between being offensive, in a natural sense, because of our particular make-up and temperament, and causing offence because we are righteous..."

III. The Blessings of Persecution—"for theirs is the kingdom of heaven..."

1. Far from fretting under such persecution, our Savior exhorts us, v12—"rejoice and be exceedingly glad..."—or as Luke has it—"rejoice in the day and leap for joy..."
2. Why should Christians rejoice when persecuted—or put another way—how are the persecuted blessed—[1] it results in the kingdom of heaven...
3. This word is a battlefield where we must expect mistreatment—but in the world to come we will be treated as royalty...
4. Let me put it this way—there is a sense in which this world is filled with enemies—and no one ever made it through without some degree of cuts and bruises...
5. Acts 14:22—"we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God..."—in other words—the kingdom lies on the other side of enemy territory...
6. Can you image a person who has had al of his possessions ceased because they were Christian—and had little or no early goods at all...
7. How sweet would this promise ring in their ears—though you have little or nothing now in this world in the next you have a kingdom...
8. Notice [2] it results in great reward, v12—"rejoice and by exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven..."
9. Now let me clarify—by "reward" our Savior has no reference to merit—it is a reward based not on merit but on grace..
10. But—having said this—it is a reward or recompence given because of our deeds and bruises obtained by our persecutors...
11. But the point is this—the very ability that enables us to live righteously and attract persecution—even that is all grace...
12. If every cup of water given in Christ' name brings its reward—then every bruise upon the body and soul received for Christ' sake will not go forgotten..
13. But you know what the Scriptures describe this reward as God Himself, Gen.15:1—"do not be afraid, Abram. *I am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward..."
14. Rev.22:12—"and behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward *is* with me, to give to every one according to his work..."
15. My brethren, what reward can possibly exceed that of Christ Himself—stop and think for a minute—any reward He brings outside of Himself will pale next to Him...
16. Some of you may know that this year for x-man my sister-n-law and her husband gave me a huge wooden carving of hymn Amazing grace

17. To put it plainly—any other gift after that had a hard time measuring up—once you get a gift like that all else pales in shadows...
18. Well my dear brethren—what reward is there that can possibly rival Christ Himself—I suggest all else is insignificant next to Him...
19. But I want you to notice carefully that text—“behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me...”—Christ’s reward is with Him because it is Him...
20. Notice [3] it shares in a rich heritage, v12—“for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you...”—in other words, you share in a rich heritage...
21. My friends, far from being a cause of shame, suffering persecution for righteousness’ sake is a means of honor and glory...
22. Hymn—“A noble army, men and boys, the matron and the maid—around the Savior’s throne rejoice, in robes of light arrayed—they climbed the steep ascent of heaven through peril, toil, and pain—O God, to us may grace be given to follow in their train...”