

Morning Sermon March 1, 2020
"The Height of Happiness: Persecution"

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:10–12 (NKJV)

I. Like the other beatitudes this one shows us God's ways are different; being persecuted is good –

From the very start of this series of sermons on the beatitudes we have talked about this as a different way toward happiness. Being "poor in spirit" is the opposite of the pride and self-confidence which our ungodly world admires! Mourning over sin the opposite of partying; or indulging in sin! Meekness is the opposite of doing things MY WAY!

Surely being persecuted for righteousness sake, is not what people dream of as kids, even as Christians, do we want to be persecuted? Yet, this is the mark of the Highest level of Christian living!

1. Note it is persecution for righteousness sake, and for Christ's sake that is blessed - persecuted for righteousness' sake :10

¹¹ "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

It is when you are persecuted for a high level of righteousness that you are blessed –

- A. This eliminates any blessing to "Christians" who might find themselves persecuted for the wrong reasons... if you are fined because you didn't pay a bill on time, that is not persecution! If a "Christian" is shunned because of a cantankerous personality or maybe even excommunicated due to sin; that is not persecution, that is not blessed.

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. 1 Peter 4:15–16 (NKJV)

- B. The blessedness spoke of here is because of an internal, real, spiritual, moral righteousness that makes a person Christ like, and obviously different from an ungodly, condemned world -

¹⁸ "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated you*. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ 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 kept My word, they will keep yours also. ²¹ But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. John 15:18–21 (NKJV)

2. Note popularity in an ungodly world is not a good sign - ²⁶ Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets. Luke 6:26 (NKJV)

3. We need to remember this world we live in is condemned – ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. ¹¹ Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of *persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? ¹³ Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. 2 Peter 3:10–13 (NKJV)

- A. In this world, efforts toward Christ-likeness, righteousness, are rewarded with persecution –

¹² Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. 2 Timothy 3:12 (NKJV)

- B. Consider, the only crown Christ Himself received in this world was a crown of thorns –

²⁹ When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put *it* on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and

mocked Him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” ³⁰ Then they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head. ³¹ And when they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified. Matthew 27:29–31 (NKJV)

II. Christ-likeness, righteousness should be our goal –

²⁸ And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. ²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Romans 8:28–29 (NKJV)

1. Persecution is not our goal! We are not aiming to be persecuted, yet our great goal, which is also God’s is our conformity to Christ’s image, the image of God –

²⁰ But you have not so learned Christ, ²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: ²² that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, ²³ and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:20–24 (NKJV)

¹⁰ and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, Colossians 3:10 (NKJV)

We are to be recreated in knowledge, righteousness and holiness, if we are persecuted for these things, even our persecution will work in our favor as we will be made more like Christ –

2. Persecution is something Christ’s apostles rejoiced in –

⁴⁰ And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹ So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. ⁴² And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. Acts 5:40–42 (NKJV)

- A. “Counted worthy” means the apostles saw persecution as not only under God’s sovereign control, but also as a reward.

- B. Note they continued preaching according to God’s command; against the command of the council.

3. Note this was true not only for the Apostles but for other early Christians –

⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, ⁸ whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹ receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:6–9 (NKJV)

Not only did these people rejoice in the midst of trials and persecution but their joy was extreme, God-glorifying joy!

III. The Kingdom of Heaven is the reward –

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

1. This is the same reward as the first, this ties them all together –
³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:3 (NKJV)

- A. A true Christian may not reach the point of persecution for righteousness sake

- B. But he / she will be “poor in spirit” –

⁴⁰ But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.” ⁴² Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”

⁴³ And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.” Luke 23:40–43 (NKJV)

2. The beatitudes describe that person who is truly saved, truly Heaven bound!

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