

**The Sermon on the Mount
Blessed Are the Persecuted
Matthew 5:10-12
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Lord willing, next Sunday, I'm going to step away from our study of the Sermon on the Mount and begin a Christmas series. We're going to look at one of the greatest passages in all the Old Testament, a promise of His coming. There is so much richness there. I'm looking forward to going through it with you, Lord willing, beginning next Sunday.

But today I want us to go back to Matthew 5, back to the beatitudes and look at the very last of the eight beatitudes our Lord gives us in this great chapter. Matthew 5. And the beatitude specifically deals with the issue of persecution. It's a little unusual, really. I mean would you say, this morning, would you reflect on your own life and say that you are persecuted? I've never really thought of myself in that way. And yet, when I think back over the years, as I've done the last week or two, I can see numerous examples in my own experience, as I'm sure you can in yours. I remember not long after as I was saved, working as I did at the time as an electrician in the shipyard, working my way through school and through my education. I remember the men intentionally waiting till I was near to tell their dirtiest jokes, to see what my reaction would be. I remember another venue in which I worked in secular employment when men would purposefully put their dirty magazines where I would see them. I remember teaching a group of men, and having their liberal Methodist pastor there, and afterwards ridiculed me for my faith in the scripture and my faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And there have been other similar incidences through my life.

And the truth is, it's not just me. If you're a Christian, you have experience persecution in perhaps similar or maybe different ways. In fact, all who have ever desired to be faithful to the true God, who have longed to live lives of righteousness, have always been treated like this. It's what happened when there were only four people on the planet. Three of them were righteous, and only one wasn't, and how did he respond? Genesis 4:8 says "Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him." That's how it's always been since that time, since the fall. It was true of Moses. They wanted to stone him. It was true of all of the prophets. 2 Chronicles 36 says they continually mocked the messengers of God. They despised His words; they scoffed at His prophets. Justin Martyr, in his dialogue with Trypho says that the Jews of Isaiah's time took a wooden saw and sawed the prophet Isaiah in half. Jeremiah, we know from scripture was thrown in a waterless well, a cistern where there was nothing but mud, and he just sank down in the mud and they left him to die. Ezekiel was mistreated. Amos was told to leave his country and give his prophecy to somebody else. John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah was hated. He

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was arrested, and eventually beheaded. Ten of the eleven of the faithful apostles were martyred. Only the apostle John wasn't, and of course he was persecuted and imprisoned on Patmos for his faith. The apostle Paul describes his own journey in 2 Corinthians 11 where he says "I was imprisoned, I was beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews 39 lashes, three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned." And of course the supreme example of the righteous suffering and being persecuted, is our Lord. Let me encourage you to do something that's really quite interesting. Read through the gospels and note everything Jesus' enemies say about Jesus. It's not a pretty picture. They accused Him of being an illegitimate son. They called Him a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. They said he was a Samaritan, which was a terrible racial slur in that day, and had a demon. They said His works were not done by the power of God, but through the power of the devil himself. In fact, they said that Jesus was actually in league with the devil.

The story continues after the early church, through the history of the church. Read the history of the Christian church, and you will see it is a history that is written in the blood of the martyrs. Jesus tells all of those who are His followers that because of who we are, we simply will not fit in to the culture around us, and because of that, we will be persecuted. Look at Matthew 5. Let me read for you this last beatitude, given to us in three verses. Matthew 5:10.

"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."

As I've said to you before, there are times and passages that we come to in the scripture that I wish you had never heard before. I wish this were the first time you were hearing these words of Jesus, because if you had heard the rest of the beatitudes that morning as He taught, there in Galilee, and He'd come to this one, it would have shocked you. One Puritan commentator was convinced that the reason Jesus repeated this beatitude in several verses, here, is because it was so unbelievable. That unlike the others, He had to say it several different ways in order to drive it home. By the way, these three verses do fit together as a package, although the word blessed occurs twice, and you might be tempted to make two beatitudes out of it. Most scholars (almost all scholars) agree that these three verses constitute only one beatitude. Clearly the theme is the same. The vocabulary is the same in all three verses. What Jesus does, is, in verse 10 He gives us the normal beatitude we've become used to, and that is in the third person He says "blessed are those" In verses 11 and 12, He expands that and He personalizes it. He says blessed are you. So what we have here in these three verses is the eighth and final beatitude that our Lord gave His disciples on that day.

Let me remind you that the beatitudes aren't so much what we should become, as what we already are if we're in Christ. Jesus says, if you belong to My spiritual kingdom, this is what you're like. These eight qualities characterize you. The first seven have to do with who we are. This final beatitude has to do with how people respond to us in light of who we are. Essentially, in this beatitude, Jesus is saying this. Spiritually prosperous (that's what the word blessed means) spiritually prosperous are those who have been persecuted because of their connection to Me and because of their pursuit of righteousness.

Now, Jesus doesn't leave us there. He develops that idea in several ways. In fact, in these three verses Jesus addresses for us several details about this persecution. And I want us to look at these details together this morning, and see if we can come to a little deeper understanding of what our Lord is saying here. The first detail that concerns us here, has to do with the forms of persecution. What forms, what types of persecution are we talking about? Clearly, the focus of these three verses is on persecution; the word occurs three times. But what does that word mean? The Greek word that's translated *persecuted* in verse 10, 11, and 12 literally means to run after someone, or to pursue someone. It came to mean to pursue someone in order to harass them. And eventually it simply came to mean to harass someone intentionally. Now, when we think of persecution, what immediately comes to your mind? When I say the word persecution, what do you think of? Well, if you're like most people, you think of physical persecution. You think of someone inflicting physical pain on you, imprisoning you, torturing you, killing you. And certainly this Greek word includes all of that. But most of us and most of the Christians throughout the history of the church have not had to face that kind of violent physical persecution. So then, why does Jesus say that persecution marks all of those who are in His spiritual kingdom, all of His true disciples? Because although the Greek word includes what we normally think of as persecution, it also includes much more.

And so Jesus further defines what He's talking about when He says persecution in verse 10, by what He says in verse 11. Look at how He informs what this persecution is, He's talking about. Notice verse 11. Jesus says "Blessed are you when people insult you" The word *insult* means to find fault with someone else intentionally in order to demean them, to shame them. It means to reproach, to revile, to mock, to insult as a way of shaming someone else. What I want you to see is, this very first word makes it clear that persecution can be merely verbal. He goes on to say in verse 11, "when people persecute you." Now in verse 10 the word *persecuted* probably has to do with the general idea, all that's included in persecution. Here in verse 11 when He uses it differently, it probably is used more specifically of physical persecution, what we traditionally think of this word. And by the way, that happens. It happens in our world today, it happened even immediately for the disciples. Go to Matthew 10. Jesus told the eleven, well he told the twelve; of course one of them would kill himself, was not a true believer. But He told the twelve, verse 16 of Matthew 10, "Behold I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves"

Verse 17, Beware of men. They'll hand you over to the courts. They'll scourge you in their synagogues. You'll be brought before secular leaders for My sake. Verse 21. Brother will betray brother to death, a father his child. Children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. You will be hated by all because of My name. Verse 23 The persecution you're going to face will cause you to have to move. You'll have to leave your city and go somewhere else. So, physical persecution can be a reality, and is a reality for many people, our brothers and sisters around the world.

Go back to chapter 5. Notice in verse 11 He continues to define this persecution. He says "Blessed are you when people. . . falsely say all kinds of evil against you." It's amazing what Christians are accused of. In the first century they were accused of meeting together to have orgies and child sacrifice. This even happens in the modern world. I remember the first time I went to Russia after the wall came down. The Soviet Union collapsed and the doors opened for us to go over there. I remember talking to some of our brothers in Christ, there in Russia. They told me that literally the secular government had accused Christians of meeting together privately in order to offer child sacrifice. There are all kinds of accusations. Those accusations may be said to you or they may not be said to you. Sometimes it's to our face, sometimes it's to others. Sometimes it's loud and direct, other times it comes indirectly as whispers behind our backs. Sometimes it's clearly stated, other times it's innuendo.

Now, according to Luke, Jesus included a couple of other forms persecution takes. Look at the parallel passage in Luke 6. Here are couple of other ways persecution expresses itself. Luke's account of these same beatitudes. Luke 6:22. "Blessed are you when men hate you" It's just hatred. We'll talk about why that is in a few minutes, but frankly, sometimes Christians are just hated. Verse 22 goes on to say they'll ostracize you. They will discourage contact with you or eliminate contact with you. They'll try to socially put you away as a pariah, out of their circle of friends. Verse 22 goes on to say they'll scorn your name as evil. Those are the forms in which persecution comes. You put the two together, Matthew 5 and Luke 6, you have all that Jesus is talking about in persecution. What I want you to see is that most of them are not physical violence. Instead, they are attitudes, hatred. They are verbal attacks, insults, ridicule, false accusations. And they are social ostracizing. As Kent Hughes says, most of the forms that persecution takes are actually quite civilized. And Jesus says that all those who truly belong to my kingdom have experienced and will experience persecution in one or more of those forms.

You say, well, why? Where does this come from? Where does this persecution come at us from? Well, obviously it comes from God's open and avowed enemies, those who have set themselves against the true God and against His Son, as we read this morning even in Psalm 2. An example in today's world would be the New Atheists. I read some quotes this week from Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, who have absolutely assaulted religion of all kinds, but particularly the Christian faith. It comes from all unbelievers. Psalm 37:12 says "The

wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes at him with his teeth" Sometimes those unbelievers are in our own families, and the persecution comes from within. Persecution comes from false religion. You see that in the Old Testament. You see that in the gospels and in Acts-- the false religion of first century Judaism that had become a works based system that was completely contrary to the old Testament. It even comes from false Christianity. In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul says one of the places his persecution came from was from false brethren, those who said they were Christians but really weren't. Today, the true faith is often attacked by those who are connected to Christianity, who call themselves Christians, but in fact do not embrace the biblical gospel. The ultimate source behind all persecution though, is not the human agent. Instead, it is the devil himself. Listen to Revelation 2. You remember the letters to the seven churches. Our Lord said this: Revelation 2:10. "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison". Obviously, with God's permission, with His sovereign purpose. But the point is, the initiator of persecution is the devil. He is attacking every way he can, God and His own.

So, persecution then comes in all shapes and sizes. It can be a verbal insult to your face, or behind your back. It can mean that you're ostracized just because you don't fit in. It may mean that you're kept out of conversations, that you're not invited to certain events, that you're hated for being too good to do what they do. Who do you think you are? You think you're so spiritual. Sometimes it means that you, as a good worker are passed over for a promotion because you won't go along with the shady business practices of the company. Sometimes as a student it'll mean that you're ridiculed for your commitment to sexual purity. Or maybe you're just left out because you don't laugh at all their off-color sexual innuendo. So many different forms persecution takes. Most of it attitudinal or verbal. So those are the forms of persecution.

But I want us to secondly consider the causes of persecution. It's important to understand that Jesus is not talking about all persecution here. Persecution is not isolated to just believers in our world. Our world is filled with hate, and therefore it's filled with persecution. Sometimes people who are not Christians are persecuted for doing what's right, for taking a stand against wrongs in the culture. Sometimes people are persecuted simply because of their ethnicity. Sometimes people are persecuted, or think they're persecuted, for their false doctrine. Yesterday I was trying to prepare to go over to the Newports to visit with them, and have a chance to fellowship together with them at Steve's bedside, when a couple of Jehovah's Witnesses knocked at my door. And I didn't have time as I normally would to really talk things through with them. I needed to go, and so I just told them that I would be praying for them that God would remove the blinders from their eyes, and that they would see that they were completely locked into a system that blasphemed the true God and His true eternal Son. And that my hope and prayer was they would come to see that. I'm sure they left my door feeling persecuted. That's not what Jesus is talking about here. Jesus is not saying that anyone who is persecuted is blessed. He's not saying that even a person who thinks they're a Christian, who is persecuted for any reason, is blessed.

Because the truth is, even genuine Christians often end up being persecuted for the wrong reasons. For example, sometimes Christians are persecuted because, frankly, they just have unattractive, sour personalities. They shouldn't. We should be filled with joy. We should be attractive as our Lord was attractive. But sometimes we just don't get along well with others, and people don't want to hang around you, and so, you think you're persecuted. Sometimes Christians are rude, insensitive, thoughtless. Sometimes there's sort of this artificial sugary false piety, that's utterly distasteful to everybody, including fellow Christians. But when that puts off unbelievers, we think we're being persecuted. Sometimes we can be proud and judgmental, and distance ourselves from unbelievers. Sometimes we can share our faith while we're being lazy and irresponsible on the job, and when we don't get the promotion, we think we're being persecuted.

Sometimes it's because of unwise, foolish, offensive methods of trying to share our faith with others. I remember one time when I was leading a trip of about 425 people. (that's when I was at Grace To You.) And we had invited listeners from all over the country to come and join us for a trip to Israel. And so I was responsible for the trip and we had about 425 people with us. So we had the better part of a 747 El Al jetliner. Of course that's the national airline of Israel. And we're flying to Israel, and of course, as you know, you get up there, you start late in the day and you have an evening meal, and then the blinds come down and the lights go down and everybody's supposed to sleep. Well about 3 or 4 hours into this everybody is trying to sleep, trying to get a little bit of rest on this long trip, and I noticed that there was a person who was with us—now understand that when we opened it up, you got anything and everything. Anybody could come, and most of the people who came were wonderful committed Christian people whose fellowship we thoroughly enjoyed. But occasionally you would get someone who didn't fit that category. And this particular time, this was true. And I woke up and I noticed there was this lady walking down the aisle with a little cart, and the cart was filled with tracts. Now this is like 3 or 4 in the morning, and she's waking Jewish people up on El Al airline to give them a tract. I ended up having to send her home later, for that and some other reasons, which is a very interesting story, but I don't have time for that now. But my point is, she felt persecuted both by me, and undoubtedly by those people who responded to her. But she wasn't being persecuted because of her faith. She was being persecuted because she was being stupid. She was being thoughtless, offensive. That isn't what Jesus is saying here.

In these verses Jesus tells us that there are only two legitimate causes for the kind of persecution that marks the person who is spiritually prosperous. The first cause, notice verse 10. He says "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of (*what?*) righteousness" You see, when you grow as a Christian and your righteousness (that is your desiring to be and to do what's right) becomes more and more obvious to the people who don't believe around you, they don't like that and they will respond in persecution. By the way, the word *righteousness* here means the same thing it did back up in verse 6. Jesus says you will be persecuted because you pursue

righteousness and display righteousness in how you think and in what you say and in your actions. You know what Jesus is saying? All you have to do to be persecuted is just want to be right and do right before God. That's it. In fact, in context Jesus is saying that if your life is characterized by the other seven qualities (the other seven beatitudes) you will be persecuted. You want to be persecuted? Verse 3. Just be a beggar in spirit, and admit that you have nothing to offer God and that your only hope is to throw yourself on His grace and mercy. People won't like they because they don't feel that way about themselves. Or just be one who mourns over your sin, and the sin of others, and they won't like you. Be one who is meek, who is submissive to God and who is gentle and gracious with others. Be one who hungers and thirsts for righteousness. Be merciful. Be one who's striving after purity of heart. Be a peacemaker. Guess what? Not everybody wants peace. Some people are perfectly happy with conflict. And they don't like it when you're messing up what they've got going.

Jesus says, just be like that and you'll be persecuted. 2 Timothy 3:12. "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus (*all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus*) will be persecuted". Look at 1 Peter 4:3 Here's why this happens. "For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, (*This is how you used to live Peter says*) having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries". Now watch what happens. That's who you used to be, Peter says. That's how you used to live. "In all this, they, (*that is the people you used to do these things with*) are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, (*and so how do they respond?*) they malign you." They don't like it because you become a mirror in which they see themselves, and they don't like what they see. In fact, look over to 1 John 3:11. John's dealing with the issue of love, and he says "for this is the message which we heard from the beginning, that you should love one another (*and then he gives an illustration of Cain*) not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother". So you need to love rather than hate. But the question is, why? Why did Cain kill Abel. Have you ever wondered that? Here it is. "and for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil and his brother's were righteous. He just couldn't bear the scrutiny that brought in his own life. He couldn't bear feeling like he didn't measure up. Like Abel was saying he was better in some way, or that God was saying he was better. He couldn't bear that, and so he killed him. This is the response we get. This is why we get it. Because we don't do what they do, it appears that we're trying to pass judgment on them, or that we're holding ourselves up as better than they are. And that elicits that response. And it is always a reality. It doesn't matter who you are. In fact, Spurgeon's biographer—Charles Spurgeon's biographer—writes that there was a period of his life in ministry when he was especially facing intense criticism, both himself and his ministry. And he was really struggling with it. Honestly, he was depressed by it. And the biographer writes that his wife, and all of our wives are a great blessing, and they really expect us to do what we teach. And my wife, I don't know why, but she expects me to actually live what I teach. Well, Spurgeon's wife did as well. And she wrote out on a large piece of paper the beatitudes including this one about persecution in large letters, Old

English script, and she tacked it on the ceiling above his bed, so that as he went to sleep at night and as he woke up in the morning, he was reminded that this is what it means to be a follower of Christ. Don't expect to be different. Because of righteousness we'll be persecuted.

There's a second cause of persecution. Not only for the sake of righteousness, but also notice in verse 11, back in Matthew 5, "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me." The Greek word for *because of*, there in verse 11 is exactly the same word translated *for the sake of* back in verse 10. So we could translate these two expressions for the sake of righteousness and for the sake of Me. Or we could translate them because of righteousness or because of me". Now, when Jesus says you're persecuted because of Me, he means this: He means you're persecuted because of your relationship with me, because you have claimed Me or confessed Me as Lord, because you believe in Me, because of your loyalty to Me, and probably even because you're beginning to act like Me. Do you understand, the first century world didn't like Jesus?

I know we have this idea, you know, if we could just get Jesus to come back, and you know in the 21st century and stay here in the metroplex, and everybody would love Jesus. No they wouldn't. Read the gospels. They hated Jesus. And our world still hates Jesus. Oh, they don't hate the sort of facade, the fabricated version of Jesus put forward by the culture of Christmastime, or the version of Jesus put forward by false religion. You know, the Jesus that never condemns, the Jesus that never says anything about sin, the Jesus that just loves everybody and wants everybody to have a wonderful life. They don't hate that Jesus. But the true Jesus, the righteous Jesus, the Jesus who confronts their sin by His own life and by His words, the Jesus who says "unless you repent you will all likewise perish" the exclusive Jesus who says "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me" That Jesus they hate. And since they hate Him and can't get at Him, they attack us instead.

If you walked into a room and you saw someone with a picture of their girl friend, or maybe a picture of their wife, (one before marriage the other afterwards—just to make that clear. I'm not saying they have both a girlfriend and a wife. I just want to be crystal clear here.) But you see them with a picture of the person they say they love, and they're looking at that picture, and they're just admiring her and they're holding it close, keeping it in their pocket here, close to their heart. They want you to see it. What does that tell you about their response to that person? Their response to their image of that person tells you a lot about their response to that person. On the other hand, if you walk in the room and you see the guy sitting there and he's got a picture of the person he says he loves, and he's got a pair of scissors. And he's slowly mutilating that picture, cutting off the ears, taking a pin and jabbing a hole right in the face. What does that tell you about that person's response, not just to the image, but to the person that image represents? That's how it is with us. People hate Jesus but they can't get to Jesus. Jesus isn't here. They got to Him in the first century, by God's plan, but they can't get to Him now. And so

what do they do? They attack His picture, His image in us. Look at John 15. Jesus in the upper room says this. Verse 18. He says

"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love it's own; but because you were not of the world and I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word I said to you, A slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, (*and they did,*) they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also".

Jesus says I'm like a litmus test. If they hated Me they're going to hate you. If they love Me they're going to love you. "But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the one who sent me." Now watch why; same reason Cain acted against Abel. Verse 22. "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, (*or guilt. In other words they wouldn't have had an acute awareness of their sin;*)but now they have no excuse for their sin" I showed them their sin by what I taught and by how I lived, so they hate me. Verse 24. "If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have had that sense of guilt; but now they have both seen and hated Me and my Father as well". That's the reason. They'll persecute us because they can't get to Jesus and we're devoted and committed to Him.

So the only persecution for which Jesus promises blessing is when people around us don't like the righteousness that we have or are pursuing, or they reject the Jesus we follow. So why isn't there more persecution around us today? Why don't we face more persecution? Kent Hughes, I think was right, when he wrote this. He said, the main reason is the church has become like the world. If you want to get along in the world, he says, the formula is simple. Approve of the world's morals and ethics, at least outwardly. Live like the world lives. Laugh at it's humor, immerse yourself in it's entertainment, smile benignly when God is mocked, act as if all religions converge on the same road . Don't mention hell. Draw no moral judgments. Take no stand on the moral political issues of our time. Above all, do not share your faith. Follow this formula and it will be smooth sailing. But that's not the way a Christian is. A true Christian remains committed to personal righteousness, and to Jesus Christ regardless of the cost.

About a hundred years after Jesus preached this sermon, the early church father Tertullian lived and ministered. One day a man came up to Tertullian and was explaining to him that he had a serious problem--that there was a conflict between his faith and his business prosperity. And he was going to have to choose what he was going to do, and he said at the end of the discussion he said to Tertullian, what can I do, I have to live. To which Tertullian responded, must you? Tertullian was making the point that the true Christian must choose righteousness and loyalty to

Christ even over living. The causes of persecution that Jesus says identify the one who's spiritually prosperous are because of righteousness and because of Jesus.

There's a third detail that Jesus addresses about persecution. It's the right response. The right response to persecution. Because even when we're persecuted for righteousness' sake, or for Jesus' sake, we can be tempted to respond sinfully. And unfortunately, we often do. What are some of the sinful responses to real true persecution? Well, this isn't very common but I'm just going to mention it. Enjoyment—or at least pretending to enjoy it. There're people who put on this sort of false piety and they act like it's a wonderful thing. That's not Christianity. That's masochism. That's not what Jesus is saying here. Another wrong response is (this is far more common) is retaliation and revenge. How dare they? Sometimes it's bitterness, anger. Sometimes we respond sinfully with surprise. Listen, don't be surprised if you're persecuted, Jesus says. Be surprised if you aren't. Often we respond to persecution--if you could think back over those instances in your own life--often we respond with discouragement. We feel sorry for ourselves. We get into self-pity. Those are the wrong ways to respond.

Jesus explains how we should react, how we should respond to persecution in all its forms. Listen, persecution isn't constant. It doesn't happen to us every day, but in those seasons when we do experience it, here's how to respond. Look at verse 12. Jesus says, "Rejoice and be glad". Rejoice. Intentionally choose to respond with joy, and be glad. The word means be overjoyed. Luke adds that our Lord said leap for joy. You say, can anyone really respond to persecution like that? Well, the apostles did. In Acts 5:41 they were flogged and it says they went on their way from the presence of the council rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. Fast forward to Acts 16. Paul and Silas arrested, beaten, bound, put in prison, and it says at midnight Paul and Silas were singing hymns of praise to God. Listen, God can give you the grace. He can give me the grace to respond to persecution with joy and gladness. This has been the response of the saints throughout the history of the church and it must be ours as well. But how?

How can you respond to insults and false accusations and being passed over for promotion, being ridiculed, laughed at, sneered at--how do you respond to that with joy? Well, it's because of the blessings that come with persecution. Jesus declares in verse 10 that all those who are persecuted for His sake and for righteousness' sake are blessed. You remember what that word means? We've looked at it now, this is the eighth time. It means spiritually prosperous, whole, spiritually well. This is absolutely counter-intuitive. Because in the first century the rabbis taught that your outward circumstances reflected God's opinion of you. So, those who were honored and respected, those were the ones God was pleased with. And the outcasts and those that were mistreated, they probably deserved it, and God was making sure they got it. Jesus turns all that on its head, and He says no. The persecuted are the spiritually prosperous. Now don't misunderstand. Lloyd-Jones was right when he says persecution is always something that

the Christian should regret. It should be to him a great source of grief that men and women, because of sin, should behave in such an inhuman manner. The Christian is, in a sense, one who must feel his heart breaking at the effect of sin in others, that makes them do this. So he never rejoices in the fact of persecution as such. So you don't rejoice in persecution. You rejoice in the blessings that come along with it, and specifically Jesus identifies three of them. Understand, persecution doesn't earn these blessings. Instead, they are always expressions of God's grace. But they come along with persecution. Notice the first blessing is: it shows our faith is genuine. Persecution shows our faith is genuine. Jesus says in verse 10 "Blessed are those who have been persecuted, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven". Jesus said, if you're persecuted on account of Me, the true Jesus, and you're persecuted on account of wanting to be and do what's right, then you really do belong to Me. You really are in My spiritual kingdom right now. Your faith is genuine. The one who faces persecution because of righteousness, or because it is confession of Jesus as Lord, and endures that persecution and remains faithful to Christ demonstrates the reality of his faith. Look at I Peter 4:12.

"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. *(Now watch verse 14)*. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, *(Notice why)* because *(this proves that)* the spirit of glory and of God rests on you."

It shows that your faith is genuine.

There's a second blessing comes with persecution. Not only does it show our faith to be genuine, but it brings a reward from God. Look at verse 12 back in Matthew 5 again. "Rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great" Here's why you rejoice. Not because you enjoy being ridiculed, you enjoy being ostracized. Rejoice and be glad because, first of all, you're going to be in heaven. That's enough, isn't it? But also because your reward in heaven is great. You say, what reward will it be? You know the scriptures are not crystal clear on that front, but I think if you read the parable in Matthew 25, it seems to indicate that the rewards we will receive are two-fold. One will be a greater capacity for service in eternity. Our faithfulness here determines our opportunity there. That'll be our reward. But there's another one. And it far outshines that one. And it seems to be the praise of our Lord. Imagine standing before our Lord and hearing Him praise us for the life we've lived on His behalf. It brings reward.

There's a third blessing, the end of verse 12. It puts us in good company. Puts us in really good company. "for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" So when we're persecuted because of Christ, or because we're simply trying to do what's right, don't be surprised. And don't be discouraged. Rejoice and be glad because it shows you are part of a great company of

the righteous down through the history of the church. This happens to everybody else who really belongs to Jesus' kingdom.

Now, as we finish our time together this morning, as with the other beatitudes, this one also is a test. The test of the genuineness of your faith. Notice the wording in verse 10. "Blessed are those who have been persecuted." Jesus is saying that although it doesn't happen all the time, if you're a Christian, it already has happened. Being persecuted is as normal a part of the Christian life as being poor in spirit, or hungering and thirsting after righteousness, or mourning over your sin. Maybe that persecution has come into your life from close family members; from your spouse or your parents or your children or a brother or sister. Maybe it came from your extended family. Kids, maybe it came from your friends at school, or sadly, maybe it even came from people here in the youth group. Maybe it came from your co-workers. But wherever it came from, when it happened, you remained faithful to Christ in spite of it. When you experience that, when you experience persecution for the sake of righteousness, for the sake of Christ, and you remain faithful to Christ, you show that you are really in His spiritual kingdom.

But remember, at the same time Jesus pronounced these blessings, Luke tells us He pronounced a series of corresponding woes. Turn with me to Luke 6. Because the opposite of this beatitude is really not good. Look at Luke 6:22. Here's the beatitude.

"Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets."

But notice how unbelievers are. Verse 26. Here are those who aren't in Jesus spiritual kingdom. "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way". Jesus says, if you know what it means to be persecuted for the sake of wanting to do what's right, because of your confession of Me as Lord, then you're in My spiritual kingdom. But if you fit in so well with the rest of the unbelievers around you that you don't know what this means, and everybody speaks well of you, and they're happy to have you engage in all of their events, then it's very likely, Jesus says, that you are not in My spiritual kingdom at all. It's a test. Blessed are the persecuted.

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for our Lord's clear teaching. Thank You for this amazing test and encouragement. Father I pray that those here this morning who truly have been persecuted for the right reasons, for righteousness' sake, for Christ's sake. Lord, they've taken insults and verbal assaults. They've been passed over. They've been sneered at. Their positions have been a joke. Father, I pray that You would encourage them. Thank You that our Lord affirmed that they really are a part of His spiritual kingdom. But Father, I pray for those here

this morning whose lives are so like the world around them, in spite of what they might profess about Christ. Maybe they claim to believe in Him, but Lord, I pray that You would help them to see what our Lord's saying here, that if the world loves you, wants you around, feels you are part of them, then you're not a part of Christ. Lord, may they see that this morning, and may they respond in true faith and repentance, and they come to know You as beggars, recognizing they have nothing to offer You. Lord we pray You would do this for the glory of Christ, for it's in His name we pray. Amen.