

“The Messianic Exchange”

Introduction: Good morning! My name is David, and it is my privilege to be leading in our talk as we conclude the series from the Beatitudes. Jesus said, **“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

“Blessed are you when they revile 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, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:10-12 NKJV)

As we prepare to take a look at the final Beatitude about persecution I would like to do so with a short story that is probably fairly descriptive of most of us. Once there was “a young man, to provide for the expenses of his sophomore year in college, planned to spend the summer in a logging camp. He had come from a Christian home and a very sheltered background. Knowing the profligate life of many of those who lived in the logging camps, his parents sought to prepare this Christian young man for the opposition he would face and the persecution he could anticipate. They did not hear from their son often during the summer, so when he came home, they questioned him about the attitude of the men toward his Christian faith. He seemed surprised they should ask. He said, ‘Why they didn’t give me a bit of trouble all summer. In fact, they never even found out that I was a Christian.’”¹

Ouch! This is far too close to the reality of many of us in our walk with Christ. For whatever the reason we so fear the scrutiny or rejection of those around us that we often work overtime with trying to fit in. Our desire for self-preservation is strong and hard to overcome. We simply want to fit in and be accepted. In His final Beatitude Jesus tells this newly formed group of disciples that they can expect to not always fit in and will experience some rejection in the days ahead. J. Dwight Pentecost says, “Love of the believer by the world is as unnatural as the love of world by the believer is unnatural. . . . In leaving the world system and accepting the standard of the Word of God, you are saying to the world, ‘I have found something in Christ superior to anything you have.’ It does not have to be verbalized, but the very fact that you cast off the things of the old life and accept the things of the new life as your goals and standards, is mute testimony you have found something superior.”²

Let’s get to work and discover even more of what Jesus was thinking when He shared this thought on that day with His disciples.

- **BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS SAKE**
 1. This Beatitude evokes a lot of thought and emotion, so the first thing we need to be clear about is what it does not say, it does not read, “Blessed are the persecuted!”
 - Just because a person goes through rejection does not mean that it is because of their faith or even the gospel message itself.

¹ J. Dwight Pentecost, The Sermon on the Mount: Contemporary insights for a Christian Lifestyle, pg 69

² J. Dwight Pentecost, The Sermon on the Mount: Contemporary insights for a Christian Lifestyle, pg 72

- R. Kent Hughes writes, “Sadly, Christians are very often persecuted not for their Christianity, but for their lack of it. Sometimes they are rejected simply because they have unpleasing personalities. They are rude, insensitive, thoughtless – or piously obnoxious. Some are rejected because they are discerned as proud and judgmental. Others are disliked because they are lazy and irresponsible. Incompetence mixed with piety is sure to bring rejection.”³
- There are a lot of reasons why we may go through persecution that have very little to do with the Gospel except that our lives do not reflect it.
- What I am saying is that this Beatitude was not written for those who may go through persecution for any reason at all. Some may well deserve the rejection they receive because their lives are not reflecting the good news they are trying to present.
- This Beatitude is written with a very specific reason for the persecution.
- 2. We need to read the words of Jesus in their entirety, “*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.*”
 - Specifically, Jesus is talking about persecution that comes because His followers are living what He has just taught them in the other Beatitudes.
 - Approved of God are those who live the character of Jesus in their life. In short, you are persecuted because you are like Jesus.
 - Notice the slight change in language from verse 10 (for righteousness sake) to verse 11 (for My sake).
 - Jesus is saying it is a rejection that takes place because of being like Him.
 - **John 15:18-20** (NIV) *“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.*”
 - The Apostle Paul said in **2 Timothy 3:12** (NIV) *In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, . . .*
- 3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer expressed it this way: “Suffering, then, is the badge of true discipleship. The disciple is not above his master. . . . Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer. In fact, it is a joy and a token of His grace.”⁴
- 4. “The word rendered ‘persecuted’ in Matthew 5:10 bears the root idea of ‘pursue’ or ‘chase.’ A good translation is ‘harass’ – ‘Blessed are the harassed.’”⁵
 - In fact, verse 11’s reiteration brings this front and center. Blessed are you when men revile or insult you, persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you.
 - “This casting of insults means literally ‘to cast in one’s teeth,’ so that the sense here is of throwing insults in one’s face.”⁶
 - So people cast insults without care as they harass those who strive to live the righteousness that Jesus called His disciples to live.
- 5. In many parts of our world persecution goes to the extreme of physical, even death.
 - Missionary Ilona Hadinger responded to a Facebook post of mine, “In communities around us, families are threatened with lynching (yes, kids, too!) because they are

³ R. Kent Hughes, The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom, pg 71

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, pg 100-101

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom, pg 73

⁶ R. Kent Hughes, The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom, pg 73

unashamedly protestant Christian. One of our Chatino pastors has recently been beaten within inches of his life. That is persecution.”

- There are people in places of our world who for no other reason than they try to live like Jesus said, righteous living, are beaten, abused, humiliated, and even killed.

6. In much of the Western world persecution looks different, but it is there and has to be dealt with.

- Michael Foster responded to the same Facebook post, “It is not always manifested in physical torment, prison or death. It is sometimes in the form of constant mockery . . . continual passive aggressive stabs at people on social networks like this one . . . it can certainly wear one down.”
- There is an emotional toil that stripes a person of hope and faith that comes from a constant rejection by others, even when that rejection is to simply ignore them.

7. What Jesus is saying in this Beatitude is that we should not be surprised when persecution comes our way for living out the righteous character of Christ.

- In fact, the real tragedy is when the Church or the Christian experiences no persecution at all, ever.

8. Like the other Beatitudes there is a promise attached to the challenge, Blessed or approved of God are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake . . .

● FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

1. Those who are faithful to right living (righteousness) and are persecuted for it, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

- Translated . . . there are rewards waiting for people who endure to the end.
- God takes note of those who are rejected because of Him, who experience persecution because they choose to live like Jesus.
- The promise is the kingdom of heaven; you will be there and enjoy all that heaven has for all eternity.
- Even in this life you will have what others do not have, the peace of God. And His peace is there in the midst of persecution.

2. The second part of the promise in this Beatitude further strengthens this as it says, *"Blessed are you when they revile 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, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:11-12 NKJV)*

- Rejoice in your rejection.
- Be exceedingly glad in your persecution.
- Why? Is it because you are a sick person who enjoys being mistreated? NO!
- Jesus calls us to

3. Rejoice because you are in good company when such treatment takes place.

- When you endure persecution for righteousness your name rests with people like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the prophets who experienced it before you.
- You are mentioned with people like Stephen, Paul, and Peter who for their faith endured to the end in the face of persecution of all sorts.
- Rejoice and be glad because you are so much like Jesus that you join the rest who went before you and were faithful to Him.
- You are in good company!

4. Be exceedingly glad because the reward is great for those who experience such persecution for living righteousness.

- The word “great” in the Greek is “*polus*,” which means “*immeasurably great*.”

- God pays attention to what has been done for His glory and He rewards it.
 - And when God rewards you for enduring to the end and being faithful in righteousness it is immeasurably great. Paul said in . . .
 - **2 Corinthians 4:16-18** (NIV) *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*
5. Those who are faithful in right living of the character of Christ even through persecution have an immeasurably great reward from God.

Conclusion: It isn't that we should want persecution, that would be insane. Rather, Jesus is teaching us that persecution is very much a part of the Christian life. He is being truthful with his new disciples. Jesus is teaching them that if they begin to live the way He is teaching them they will need to be prepared for others to reject them. He wants them to know what is ahead of them. He is being honest with them.

The reality is that God works through people in this world. And so when you and I live the character of Christ as we read about here in the Beatitudes that is going to impact other people around us. Now think about it for a moment . . . it is part of being a Christian because God is using you to bring light to those around you. He is exposing the truth of their situation with the truth of the Good News and not everyone wants what Jesus brings to life.

In the same Facebook post as the others we mentioned before, one of our Bridge family members also shared. Roshni DiStefano said, "I know some of us have been through a lot for the sake of 'radical' faith in Jesus without even stepping out of our homes. Would we go through it again??? YES . . . in a heartbeat, because of the fruit that GOD has been able to bring forth from it!" This is the heart that God is looking for, a people who even when they know the pain of rejection are willing to do it again and again because they have found Him to be worth it.

As we close this part of the series let's do so with looking one more time at the passage from **Matthew 5:1-12** (NKJV) *And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:*

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
For they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.*

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

*"Blessed are you when they revile 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, for
so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Today we call you to a radical life to live the radical character of the Beatitudes and to do so with the understanding that such a life will bring persecution at times to your life. Moving with Christ, not blind to, but prepared for what is to come.