

## The Price Of Faithfulness

*Sermon on the Mount, Vol. 9*

HBC 9/9/20

Matthew 5:10-12

A true relationship with Christ is described by Jesus in the beatitudes we have studied so far. The characteristics of true believers are:

**Beggarly poor in spirit**—a recognition you have nothing to help your spiritual condition and you can't do anything about it.

**Mourning over your sin** because you see it as God sees it, and you hate it.

**Meekness**—the character quality wrought by the Spirit of God working in the heart of a redeemed sinner.

**Hunger and thirst for righteousness**—the change in appetite developed by God in His children.

**Mercy**—because those who receive the mercy and forgiveness of God are so changed they become merciful and forgiving.

**Pure in heart** is the evidence that God is at work, transforming a life from the inside out, as opposed to man's way of trying to reform from the outside in.

**Peacemakers** is the description of redeemed people who become instruments of truth and righteousness.

As we've said at every opportunity, these beatitudes (or  **blessings** ) are both the **description** of a Christian, because they describe the fundamental changes that come with salvation, and they are the **goals** of the Christian life because they describe the way God intends for us to demonstrate our changed lives by our behavior.

The beatitudes close with the **price tag** for living out the life of a Christian. **When you live as a Christian, some people won't like it.** Persecution is part of the Christian life to one extent or another, depending on your circumstances. Jesus promises to bless those who endure it for His sake.

### I. Persecution in Principle

*Matthew 5:10: Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Notice that the promise of this blessing is exactly the same as the first beatitude: **for theirs** (*theirs alone—no one else's*) **is the kingdom of heaven.** This is talking about a Christian. No one gets into the kingdom of heaven except those whose lives are described

by these beatitudes, because the beatitudes describe the kind of people who are **new creations** in Christ à la 2 Corinthians 5:17.

**Have been persecuted** is looks back on previous generations of faithful servants of God, up to Jesus' day. The Greek perfect tense includes present results, however, so it's safe to take this as an **ongoing truth**. Also, verse 11 will bring it into the present for us, making it clear that this is not just a thing of the past.

**What is persecution?** The word used here is the same one used most of the time in the New Testament. It means literally **to pursue**. Used like this in the New Testament, it means **pursuit in a hostile manner, harassment, molestation, injury, or driving someone away**.

In this beatitude, Jesus strikes at one of the tenets of the Pharisees of His day. The rabbis generally taught that all suffering and persecution was a sign of God's displeasure and of the wickedness of the one suffering. Think John 9.

Jesus brings a completely different perspective. He pronounces God's **blessing** on those who are persecuted, *with one important qualification: **For the sake of righteousness***. Don't slip by that phrase and go away thinking God is duty-bound to bless you every time you are persecuted. If you are simply obnoxious and you get persecuted because of it, you're just reaping what you sow. If you act like a fanatic, without good judgment, the same is true. If you do something wrong, the consequences are part of God's chastening you. If you are being difficult, complaining, making yourself a nuisance, being a fool, or insulting people, **you don't qualify for this blessing**.

Peter, who spent plenty of time stepping in messes he created by shooting off his mouth and acting out his brash impulses went on to write this:

*1 Peter 2:19–20: For **this finds favor**, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.*

## II. Persecution in Person (11)

Lest we think this is something only the super saints of history had to deal with, Jesus gets personal.

*Matthew 5:11: Blessed are **you** when people insult **you** and persecute **you**, and falsely say all kinds of evil against **you** because of Me.*

**You** is a key to this verse. Jesus switched from the third person **those who** to the very personal pronoun **you**. If you follow Jesus, **this will happen to you**. They will do this to **you**, He says, *because of me*. It is a promise of God. It isn't here to produce spiritual paranoia. It's reality. Here it is again, from the pen of Paul:

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

How might it happen to you? Look in the verse for clues:

Matthew 5:11: *Blessed are you when people **insult** you and **persecute** you, and **falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.***

**Insult you.** There's no end to the creativity godless people use to come up with fresh ways to put you down for following Jesus. You might be called a *nerd*. You might be called a *prude* for not enjoying foul humor or filthy entertainment. *Taunting* can be tailored to whatever hurts you the most. *Name-calling* has always been popular.

**Persecute you.** This is pretty general. The previous worst century in history for persecuting Christians was the 20th. The 21st is worse.

**Say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of [Jesus].** Have you ever had anyone lie about you? Attribute wicked motives to you? Spread misinformation to keep you from getting a promotion? It **really hurts**. Make sure when cruel things are said about you, that you remain steadfast in serving the Lord. That leads to the next verse.

### III. Persecution and Praise (12)

Matthew 5:12: *Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

**Rejoice and be glad** are the only two commands so far in the Sermon on the Mount. You can tell that **rejoice** and **be glad** are **not emotions**. God isn't telling you to feel a certain way. It's impossible to feel a certain way on command, because feelings are reactions.

You can be **unhappy, but joyful**. The reason is that being **happy** is a passing feeling related to external circumstances in this life. Being **joyful** is a disposition that is theologically defined. Joy comes from being anchored in eternal truths of God and His grace and mercy in Christ. We can be unhappy when it comes to our bodily experience in this world, but we are not to be without joy which is the inevitable product of the gospel. What is commanded in verse 12 is not related to this world!

**Your reward in heaven is great** is here to encourage you when you can't see anything good happening at the moment. **Paying the price of faithfulness** is part of living in this sin-cursed, upside-down world. But the price you pay now is an investment to be returned multiplied in heaven.

**The prophets who were before you** recalls some of the most ugly and discouraging aspects of the history of Israel. Time won't permit dealing with their stories. But do you know what Stephen said just before he was stoned for his faith in Christ and for preaching the Gospel?

Acts 7:51–52: *You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become;*

Don't take this passage as a reason to begin to pray for persecution. That isn't the point. Looking for trouble will only lead to finding it, and that isn't our goal. But it's legitimate to ask yourself if your life is making enough difference that it evokes a reaction from anyone. If your life is so comfortable that you are unschooled in persecution, you should wonder why.

Maybe you have insulated yourself from the people who need you the most. One of the worst things American evangelical Christianity and fundamentalism has done is to define spiritual maturity in such a way that it discourages mature believers from being involved with people who need the Lord.

Or maybe the reason you aren't getting any flack is that you simply don't live the life Jesus designs for you except to put on a facade in front of other Christians. Spiritual chameleons don't make very many waves.

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Examine your life alongside these beatitudes. If you see some work that needs to be done, now is the perfect time to begin talking with God about it and asking Him to bring about some changes.

**Beggarly poor in spirit:** Do you recognize you have nothing in yourself to help your spiritual condition. Do you come to God with empty hands?

**Mourning over your sin:** Because you see it as God sees it, and therefore you hate it and turn from it.

**Meekness:** The character quality wrought by the Spirit of God working in the heart of a redeemed sinner so love what God loves and hate what He hates.

**Hunger and thirst for righteousness:** Do you have, and constantly cultivate the appetite for the things of God?

**Mercy:** Those who receive the mercy of God are so changed they become merciful and forgiving. Are you an instrument of God's mercy?

**Pure in heart:** Is there evidence that God is at work, transforming your life from the inside out?

**Peacemakers:** Are you one of His redeemed people who become instruments of truth and righteousness?

**Persecuted:** Is it obvious you represent Christ in a world system that hates Him?