

*Matthew 5:9 Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”*

### **The Final Beatitude**

- ✓ It concludes as the first began – with the promise of “the kingdom of heaven” (closure)
- ✓ It speaks of righteousness, as does the 4<sup>th</sup> beatitude. There, it was the filling of righteousness after being empty of self; now it is the result of righteousness lived out being full of God
- ✓ It is different from the others in that it is not the blessing of character, but of the result of character (persecution). That is, a life emptied of self and filled with God will be blessed by persecution. In that sense, it is the supernatural culmination of a life rightly lived.
- ✓ It is the one most contrary to the thinking of the world, thus climactic: – blessed persecution
- ✓ It is the most searching test of our kingdom credentials – am I a target of persecution?

### **Is Persecution Teaching Outdated?**

1. No – it continues actively around the globe. Millions of Christians are being persecuted today. “Voice of the Martyrs” magazine and persecution.com are two active resources.
2. No – Paul’s words to Timothy are still true for today’s kingdom citizens:

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

### **Why Persecution?**

1. In response to righteousness lived out in the name of Christ – showing of mercy, purity of heart and peacemaking. It reveals their lack of righteousness, so persecution comes.  
**1 Peter 4:12-14** *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.*
2. In response to the Jesus they see in me. It reveals their sinfulness, so persecution comes.  
**John 15:18-25** *“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but 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 kept my word, they will also keep yours.”*

### **3 Possible Responses to Righteousness (John 3:20-21)**

1. Persecution – a negative response  
**John 3:20** *For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. (like cockroaches)*
2. Acceptance – a positive response  
**John 3:21** *But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God. (like moths)*
3. Delayed reaction - seeming indifference or non-response  
I offer a third option, for often there is neither outright persecution nor open acceptance. But be wise to know that righteousness will always cause rejection or acceptance ultimately. But the reaction may be delayed or hidden from your perception.  
**1 Peter 3:14** *But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled.*

### **What Persecution is Not Indicated Here**

Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his book “Studies in the Sermon on the Mount” gives a number of ways

we might be persecuted that is NOT what Jesus is speaking of in this Beatitude.

✓ NOT persecution for being objectionable or doing evil

**1 Peter 3:17** *For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.*

✓ NOT persecution for over-zealousness or fanaticism

✓ NOT persecution for defending a noble cause

### **Righteousness Will Be Persecuted** *(My thanks to Pastor John Piper for these observations)*

✓ If you cherish chastity, you will be attacking those who favor free sex

✓ If you embrace temperance, you will be attacking substance abuse

✓ If you pursue self-control, your life will indict those who over-indulge

✓ If you live happily in simplicity, you will show the folly of luxury

✓ If you walk humbly with your God, you will expose the evil of pride

✓ If you are punctual & thorough, you show the inferiority of laziness & negligence

✓ If you show compassion, you will be in stark contrast to callousness

✓ If you are earnest, you will make flippant look flippant instead of clever

✓ If you are spiritually minded, you will expose the worldly mindedness around you

Your demonstrating of these qualities of righteousness will surely incur some degree of persecution.

### **Our Response to our Persecutors**

1. Love and pray

**Matthew 5:44** *But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*

2. Not ashamed, but glorify God

**1 Peter 4:16** Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

2. Rejoice for the privilege of identifying with the prophets and Jesus

**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.*

Truly, I feel very inadequate to speak to you of persecution. Yes, like many of you I have felt the rejection of those who had no desire to hear of my faith or be invited to my church. Yes, my righteous stance on chastity before marriage, defending the right of the unborn or believing that marriage is only between a man and a woman has caused distance between some. But I know nothing of the persecution of the prophets of old.

Abel was persecuted by Cain. Noah was persecuted by all who saw him build an ark in the desert. Joseph was persecuted for his unwillingness to have sexual relations with Potiphar's wife. Moses was persecuted by the very Hebrew nation he was leading to the Promised Land. David was persecuted by King Saul. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were persecuted for their unwillingness to bow down to an idol. Daniel was persecuted for his prayers to the God of Israel. And hear the summary that the author of Hebrews gives to the persecutions of the prophets.

**Hebrews 11:36-38** *[They] experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.*

And hear Paul's account of his many persecutions.

**2 Corinthians 11:23-27** *...beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was*

*stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.*

These reminders, as well as the incredible sufferings of our Lord Jesus, make our protestations of persecution seem like nothing. And yet we come back to Paul's great teaching to Timothy:

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

That is you and me, dear fellow kingdom citizen. It is our predicted lot, if we indeed live out our righteousness as light and salt in the world. And if we are not experiencing some degree of persecution, rejection or avoidance, it should give us pause as to whether our light is shining so brightly for all to see.

## **FINALLY – THE REWARD PROMISED**

As we finish our consideration of this eighth Beatitude, let us look into the pages of Revelation and see what the apostle John saw as he was given vision into the heavenly realm, specifically about the martyrs of our faith – those who have suffered and will suffer the ultimate price of life taken for their faith. And this too will be the ultimate reward of all kingdom citizens – for all will be survivors of persecution for standing up for God's righteousness.

**Revelation 6:9-11** *When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.*

**Revelation 7:13-17** *Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*

Our robes will be washed and white. We will serve before the throne of God. There will be no more hunger or thirst for anything but God. We will be forever protected from all foes. Jesus the Lamb will be our eternal shepherd. He will guide us to eternal springs of living water. He will wipe away every tear, leaving only eternal joy.

No wonder that we are blessed if we are persecuted. No wonder that we are to rejoice in our tribulations for the sake of Christ. No wonder that being a citizen of God's forever kingdom feels so very good! Blessed are we indeed, dear fellow kingdom citizens!