

*Matthew 5:10-12 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.*

### **THE CONCLUSION OF THE CREDENTIALS**

We have come to the conclusion of the Beatitudes – the eight sayings of Jesus that introduce His “Sermon on the Mount.” And the final Beatitude we considered last week was the blessing of being persecuted for the sake of righteousness. When we bear the family resemblance of our Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus, some form of persecution eventually will come (2 Timothy 3:12). For just as Jesus was rejected by many, so the Jesus in us will be rejected by many. “A servant is not greater than His master,” said Jesus.

### **CLARIFICATION OF THE COMMITMENT**

Today’s Scripture, Matthew 5:11-12, develops this thought a little further. Apparently, Jesus wanted to clarify and emphasize the issue of persecution. Where as in each of the Beatitudes he spoke generally, saying “blessed are they ...”, He now speaks personally, as to the disciples, “blessed are you ...” Remember, Jesus had just called the 12 to be in His “inner circle” of followers (Luke 6, for chronology), and He wanted to be sure they understood the depth of commitment to which they were called. Likewise, he wants us as His followers today to know the depth of our calling – it is all or nothing! And the road of a Jesus follower is not an easier road, though it is a more blessed road.

### **CLARIFICATION OF “LESSER” PERSECUTION**

One of the clarifications regarding persecution we get in verse 11. Although persecution is often the ultimate persecution of losing one’s life, it is not always so. Therefore, Jesus equates persecution with “insults,” “falsehoods” and “all kinds of evil” brought upon the righteous believer. These may be lesser forms of persecution, but they are persecution nonetheless. We might include in that list rejection, avoidance, snide remarks or even intentional cursing in our presence. This too is persecution, if it is indeed in response to our righteous behavior. We might lose jobs, or not receive invitations to social gatherings, or not be treated as equal members of family, or become the butt of jokes. Our spirituality might be questioned and judged, and our every action closely examined for any trace of hypocrisy. Despite the “log” in their own eye, they will condemn the “speck” in our eye.

### **CONFIRMATION OF KINGDOM CREDENTIALS**

Equally blessed are we as kingdom citizens when we are persecuted in any of these ways. It doesn’t take death at the stake or a beheading to demonstrate persecution. Challenges to our righteousness are also confirmations of our kingdom credentials, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” concludes Jesus.

Do you ever feel insulted for being a Christian? Do you ever feel rejection? Do you ever feel as though your spirituality is being unfairly scrutinized? Then rejoice, says Jesus. NOT for the persecution. No one wants to be persecuted, and neither does God have a morbid desire for you to suffer persecution.

So for what are we to rejoice? Rejoicing seems so foreign to the natural response to persecution. And that’s the point. It is NOT a natural response, but a supernatural one that the Spirit of God within will give! And here, Jesus gives the 3 primary reasons for rejoicing in persecution. (Yes, I think God likes 3-point outlines – He gives us many!) Let’s look at them in turn.

#### **1. REJOICE BECAUSE THEY SEE JESUS IN YOU**

Verse 11 concludes with “*because of Me.*” We are to rejoice when these insults, falsehoods and

evil come our way because that means THEY SEE JESUS IN US! Now that's cause for rejoicing. I confess I sometimes wonder how much of Jesus comes through me. After all, I can't make that happen – it is a supernatural work of the Spirit as I give Him permission. But when I see rejection of my righteous words and behavior, it is a sure signal that Jesus has been seen in me. Wow – no kidding? – that is fantastic! That's the perspective that Jesus is trying to teach us as His disciples. Rejoice in bearing His character – including the persecution that comes with it.

Steven rejoiced in being identified with His Savior as he was being stoned to death. Paul rejoiced in the many sufferings he endured for the sake of Christ. Tradition tells us that Peter asked to be crucified upside down since he didn't count Himself worthy to be crucified in the same manner as His Lord. But he rejoiced for the privilege. Christian martyr after Christian martyr through the centuries, at the point of their life being taken on account of their faith, have given praise for the privilege of Jesus having been seen in them. May that be our response when we suffer even lesser persecution for our faith.

## 2. REJOICE BECAUSE YOU DON'T BELONG HERE

Verse 12 goes on to say that we are to rejoice because *“your reward in heaven is great.”* Now we are NOT being told to work for or be persecuted for the great reward to come. Muslim suicide bombers are willing to die for a cause, they say, because there is reward of celestial virgins awaiting them in the afterlife. Reward after death is not our motivation, even though Jesus teaches that there will be a great reward to come. Rather, Jesus and Scripture throughout teach that there is an eternal place in heaven for all who overcome by the blood of the Lamb. We learn that *“this world is not my home.”*

Paul in **Philippians 1:21**: *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”*

Paul in **Colossians 4:2-3**: *Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*

**Hebrew 12:2** *Fixing our eyes on Jesus ... who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

John in **1 John 2:15**: *Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

And on and on the teaching goes. We are aliens in this world, for we have been translated into another kingdom – the kingdom of heaven. We are in the world, but not of the world. (John 17:16). So REJOICE!

We spend so much time and effort “trying to fit it.” I want to be accepted, I want to be liked, I want to keep up appearances. I want recognition. And yet if I am living out my Christian faith in words and acts of righteousness, I often am NOT accepted. No wonder you often feel rejection – YOU DON'T BELONG HERE!

## 3. REJOICE BECAUSE YOU ARE IN GOOD (GOD) COMPANY

Verse 12 concludes with the third primary reason for rejoicing in persecution – we are in the good company of the multitude of men and women of God who have stood for Christ and suffered persecution.

**Polycarp** was a disciple of John the apostle, probably chiefly responsible for compiling the New Testament we have today. He was sentenced to burn at the stake for his faith, but tradition says that the flames did not kill him, so he was stabbed to death.

**John Wycliffe** believed the Scriptures should be available to the people in their common tongue, so he is best remembered as a translator of Scripture. He was greatly persecuted for this stand against Papal authority. His body was exhumed and burned along with many of his writings.

**John Huss** was a Czech priest who was burned at the stake for heresy against the doctrines

of the Catholic Church in 1415.

**William Tyndale**, most known for his translation of the Bible into English, was a reformer who stood against many teachings of the Catholic Church and the marital improprieties of the King Henry the 8<sup>th</sup>. He was choked to death while tied to the stake in 1536.

Pastor **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** was executed in 1945 in a concentration camp in which he was held for his opposition to Hitler's treatment of Jews by mass murders. As a Christian pastor he could not sit idly by and not stand up for the Christ who loved all mankind.

**Jim Elliot** who killed in 1956 while trying to establish contact with the Auca Indians in Ecuador. He and four other missionary friends were slaughtered by the very ones they were trying to reach for Christ.

And the list goes on in the Middle East, in North Korea, in Africa, in Columbine and around the globe. We are to rejoice in our comparatively meager persecutions because we are in the good company of millions of martyrs who have gone before us standing up for righteous principles of their Savior Jesus.

- 1. REJOICE BECAUSE THEY SEE JESUS IN YOU**
- 2. REJOICE BECAUSE YOU DON'T BELONG HERE**
- 3. REJOICE BECAUSE YOU ARE IN GOOD (GOD) COMPANY**

Remember, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake!

## **IN SUMMARY OF THE BEATITUDES**

- √ The constitution of who we are as citizens of God's kingdom
- √ 8 supernatural characteristics of every follower of Christ
- √ The path to true happiness now and forever
- √ There is a progression to their order
- √ #1-4 teach how to be filled with righteousness
  - a. Emptying of self
  - b. Filling with God
- √ #5-8 teach how to live out righteousness
  - a. Mercy, Purity and Peacemaking
  - b. Rejoicing in persecution