

Matthew 5:10-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on (9/20/2009)

How can we know if we are saved? Blessed are those who have been persecuted

Prayer

Oh Father, You are so great and so wonderful. You are so kind and so loving, and I am so thankful for Your Son Jesus. I am so thankful that You took pity on a wretch like me. That You took pity on us in our helpless state, helplessly caught in sin, and You sent Your Son Jesus to die for us. That You demonstrate Your love for us in that while we were yet sinners, that Christ died for us. Father we did nothing in that salvation, You did it all. And Father, I thank You that You are continuing to save us, and we will be saved, Lord God, that You declared us righteous and You are now setting us apart, and You will glorify us. And Father, I thank You as Your Son prayed to You, "Sanctify them in Thy truth, Thy Word is truth." That You use Your Word now to set us apart unto Yourself as clean vessels. I pray as we look into Your Word today that You would give us wisdom and insight, that we might not be forgetful, diluted hearers having sin in our lives, that we would confess our sins, set them aside, and receive the Word implanted. So Father, we just entrust this time to You, may You be greatly glorified as Your Word does its work in our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sermon

Well, for many of us, at times the Christian experience, if you could call it that, is one of extremes. We follow the Lord, and then at times we follow ourselves and others. We fear the Lord, and then at times we forget the Lord. Now, often the reason why we forsake the Lord and forget the Lord is that sometimes the difficulty that God allows to come upon us, we allow to draw our hearts and minds off of Christ. And folks, if you desire to follow Christ, if you are His, and you want to follow Him, as we will see today just as you see on the front of your bulletins, "Indeed those who desire to live godly will be persecuted."

Now, so often we expect our sufferings and persecutions to be like those who are burned at the stake. You may say, "I've never suffered like the martyrs." (Now obviously we haven't because we are not dead.) But we've obviously never suffered like them when before they were put to death. We do not see suffering like that in America. And some might think that therefore, we're not persecuted. But I believe we are going to see today that along with physical persecution that there is verbal and other types of persecution that will come to those who desire to live godly.

Unfortunately, our day to day life is sometimes not that way, but more often than not we suffer in our day to day relationships because we following Christ. You may temporarily suffer in your marriage for doing the right thing and saying the right thing. You may suffer in raising your children because you are raising them in a Godly way. You may suffer at work because you are doing your work unto the Lord. You may suffer when you come alongside a brother to win him when he is in sin. You may suffer when

Matthew 5:10-12

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you are unwilling to “go with the flow” of the worldly church these days. And you may suffer when you point out those dangers to others.

Now sometimes when we are caught in sin, because of guilt, we begin to wonder if we are truly saved. When we are wallowing in the guilt of sin, sometimes we may say, “Am I saved?” And there is nothing wrong with examining yourself to see if you are in the faith, as Paul tells the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians chapter 11. But sometimes in these difficult situations, we might be tempted to pull our eyes off of Christ because we really don’t know what is really going on. But in other situations, we see that suffering is an evidence (and in the Beatitudes, the final evidence) that we are truly children of God.

So today I believe we are going to see the final evidence of how we can know, in our last portion of the Beatitudes, how we can know if we are saved. And I believe we need to answer the question: Have you been persecuted for righteousness’ sake lately? Would you turn in your Bibles with me to Matthew chapter 5. I am going to briefly go through the context as we need to remember the previous pronouncements of blessing. There are those pronouncements that Christ has made so far, and we need to look at those. And remember as I have talked about the Sermon on the Mount, or what we call the Sermon on the Mount, chapters 5-7 in the book of Matthew, it’s my belief as I have studied it so far that Jesus is presenting kingdom righteousness which confronts phony righteousness, which is actually lawlessness. I believe that is what chapters 5-7 are about.

Jesus is graciously confronting phony righteousness with what true kingdom righteousness looks like. And remember, it is important to note that the gospel is not presented in the Sermon on the Mount. It is not presented in the Beatitudes, as we will see. There is no revelation concerning Christ dying for our sins and rising from the dead. You cannot read this sermon or live by this sermon and be saved. The only way we are saved is through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. But as we have seen the last few months, I believe this sermon will convict us of where we stand before the living God.

And if you will remember the context which we saw a couple months ago, Jesus Christ is coming to His own people, the Jews. God had made a covenant with them through the Law. The Law was never intended to save but was a schoolmaster, to reveal their sin, to bring them to Christ the Savior. Christ being the sacrifice that all the Old Testament sacrifices foreshadowed. And they should have recognized and known that they were sinful, instead of believing they were righteous. They should have looked forward to the promised redemption. They should have looked forward to the fact that there would be a Wonderful Counselor, a Mighty God, a Father of Eternity (not an Eternal Father but a Father of Eternity), a Prince of Peace, who would bear our sins and be pierced for our transgressions.

So then, we have Jesus coming to His own, the Jews who claimed to have a relationship with the living God. If you talked to a Jew in this day, they would say, “Yahweh is our God, the Lord is our God, we believe in the God of the Word.” They would say that, every one of them. But God was gracious to come to them. And Christ reveals to them through His Word where their hearts really stand. And I believe we are going to see what a changed life looks like for those who are in the kingdom, and those who are not.

Matthew 5:10-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on (9/20/2009)

So what have we seen in the Beatitudes so far? What have we seen in these “Blessed” statements so far? Remember, the multitudes were not following Jesus for His preaching and teaching which He was doing, they were following for His healings. And these same multitudes followed Him, and He goes up on a mountain in the beginning of chapter 5 of Matthew and He begins to teach His disciples. And at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 7 we see that He was teaching the multitudes also. And in verses 3 through 10 we have what we call “The Beatitudes,” these pronouncements of blessing that reveal what the blessed (those who are blessed) look like. Not what the blessed should do, but what the blessed look like.

Let’s read those again. Matthew 5, and let’s start back in verse 1,

¹ And when He saw the multitudes, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. ² And opening His mouth He began to teach them, saying, ³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. ⁵ "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. ⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. ⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. ⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. ⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. ¹⁰ "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." [Matthew 5:1-10]

And I am just going to point this out right now. I was going to share it later but if you look at verse 3, notice it says, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” And then again in verse 10, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” You have the end of the Beatitudes here. “Blessed are those, blessed are they...” Then we’re going to see a personal illustration and application in verse 11,

¹¹ "Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. ¹² "Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." [Matthew 5:11-12]

So if you will remember, we have looked at these Beatitudes, we have looked at this idea of “blessedness.” And this term “blessedness” is not tied to circumstances, like what we see in a worldly sense. But it is Biblically speaking tied to a right relationship with the living God. And we looked at many passages, and I’ve shared them each time and I will share some again concerning those who are truly blessed. It is intricately tied to a right relationship with the living God through Christ.

Psalm 34:8, ***O taste and see that the LORD is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!***

Romans 4:7-8, quoting the Old Testament Paul says, ***⁷ "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, And whose sins have been covered. ⁸ Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take***

Matthew 5:10-12

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into account." You are blessed if you have been forgiven. Blessed is the saved man! The one whose sin has been take care of in Christ.

Psalms 94:12, **Blessed is the man whom Thou dost chasten, O LORD, And dost teach out of Thy law;**

Psalms 84:12, **O LORD of hosts, How blessed is the man who trusts in Thee!**

Psalms 112:1, **Praise the LORD! How blessed is the man who fears the LORD, Who greatly delights in His commandments.**

Psalms 119:2, **How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, Who seek Him with all their heart.**

It is speaking of a relationship with the living God. And then in Luke 11:28 we have the lady who cried out concerning Jesus, she wanting to pronounce blessing on His earthly mother. And in response He says, **"On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God, and observe it."**

Blessed are those who have changed hearts and hear the Word and do what He says. Blessed are those who have a relationship with the living God because of the forgiveness of sins. That's what true blessedness is in Scripture. It is not happiness based on circumstances, but is intricately tied to a relationship with the living God.

And I have shared (and this will be the last time since we are finishing up here) these are not the "Do-attitudes." He's not saying to go do this stuff to be right with God, He is saying that the blessed do these things. This is who they are. This is how they live. "Blessed are those who do 'this.'" They live this way because of a changed heart, as we will see. It is an evidence of blessedness, not how to be blessed.

Now who is it that Jesus says is blessed here? We see it is those who, as we have seen throughout this passage, have a right relationship with Him through the forgiveness of sins. Do you see how this all fits together? True believers have recognized their spiritual bankruptcy before Christ, they are poor in spirit; they are spiritually bankrupt. They are unrighteous, in need of His righteousness. And true believers continue to realize that truth.

And true believers, this very unrighteousness within ourselves causes us to mourn before the living God because of our sin. The truly saved are going to exhibit the character of Christ, the fruit of a relationship with Him. They are going to manifest His righteousness in gentleness. There is going to be a hunger for His righteousness. There will be a merciful heart like Christ's. They are going to have clean hearts, pure, clean hearts. "Blessed are the pure in heart." The only one that can be pure in heart can be one who has had their conscience cleansed by Christ, purified from sin. And blessed are those who declare the message that made it all happen, the gospel of peace, and therefore live in the context of peace.

And folks, I believe what we have seen the last few months point to a righteous life in Christ, and this last one sums it all up. If you live a righteous life in Christ, if you were truly blessed then the next Beatitude is going to happen. And we come to our passage today, where I believe, we need to know and understand that the blessed, or the saved, will have been persecuted because of His righteousness lived

Matthew 5:10-12

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out. Let's take a look at Matthew 5:10, "¹⁰ 'Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "¹¹ Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. ¹² Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.'" [Matthew 5:10-12]

Now I have already pointed this out but I want to mention again the structure of this passage. You have the first seven Beatitudes pointing to the righteous life in Christ, and this last one (which is very interesting - has the term "has been persecuted") is in a perfect tense. Well what does that mean? It is a completed action in the past with results continuing into the present. All of the rest of the Beatitudes are in the present tense, "Blessed are... blessed are..." These things that *are* happening. And then He says, "Blessed are those who *have been* persecuted..." And then we see in verses 11 and 12 a personal illustration. Quite possibly the Lord Jesus is teaching to all, and then He turns to His disciples and says "Blessed are *you* when men cast insults at you."

Now we don't know who He was looking at but we know that there is a change from third-person to second-person. And again I want to make it clear that the Beatitudes are about those who are in the kingdom of heaven. "For theirs is the kingdom of heaven." So let's begin to look at our passage in verse 10, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness..." Again, I mentioned it was a perfect tense. It's the only perfect tense there in the group. It's a completed action, it has happened already. "Blessed are you that have already experienced persecution. Blessed are you..." For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who have been persecuted in the past, completed action, with results continuing into the present. And I believe this whole portion here points to the fact that those who live righteous lives in Christ, who are truly walking with the living God, those who are truly blessed, Christ living through them, will have been persecuted. It is just the reality that addresses everyone who is truly blessed. One pastor (John MacArthur) puts it this way,

Those who have been persecuted are citizens of the kingdom, those who live out the previous seven beatitudes to the degree that they fulfill the first seven days and may experience the eighth.

As Christ's life is being lived out in your life, you are going to be persecuted. Now this is the sermon you don't want to hear, right? You want to hear about having a happy life, a great marriage and great fun and all sorts of stuff like that. And you want to hear about how Christ can make everything wonderful for you. And here, He finishes the Beatitudes with "Blessed are those who have been persecuted." Another pastor (Unknown) said that this is one of the largest oxymorons in Scripture, "How happy are the harassed." It doesn't make sense. But I believe we are going to see that it does make sense in the context of what Scripture declares concerning how the world will respond to Christ and His people.

So before we begin, I also want to point out one more issue here. There are some who have a theology that when they look at the Beatitudes they say, "This is kingdom living in the Millennium." The 1,000

Matthew 5:10-12

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year reign of Christ. They say, "This is not for us, it is Millennial kingdom living." And I say that that is not the case because Scripture goes against that belief because Scripture says, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted... (and then He says) Blessed are you who are persecuted." And you say, "Wait a second. There is no persecution in the Millennium." This is speaking of the time right then and there when Jesus was speaking to the Jews, at that point under the Law. And the same things apply to us right now.

Now as we look at this, I think we need to understand what persecution is. As I talked to people and things come up concerning suffering and persecution, often I think we have a wrong view of persecution. We think, "Wow, I sprained my ankle, I am being persecuted for Christ!" Is that really what it is? What is persecution? What is Biblical persecution when Jesus says, "Blessed are those have been persecuted"? What does He mean by that?

First of all, if you look at this Greek word translated "have been persecuted," the verb *dioko*. It is actually speaking of literally pursuing. It can actually be translated in a positive sense "to pursue." But in a negative sense it obviously takes on the idea of persecution, or hostile pursuit. It is speaking of hostile pursuit. Someone is after you in a hostile sense, it is persecution. They are pursuing you physically or verbally. It is persecution in that manner, a hostile pursuit. Now certainly persecution and suffering are two different things, though related. When one is truly being persecuted, we are suffering, right? No doubt about that. But remember there is the possibility of suffering without being persecuted.

Persecution speaks of a hostile pursuit. And we see this in our Christian life, and we need to make sure at times that we do not consider ourselves being persecuted when we truly aren't. We are going to look at it later on, but a lot of Christians I talk to at times talk about persecution, but I say, "Wait a second, you are just reaping the results of your sin. You have been a jerk to people at work about Christ and people are having a bad attitude towards you." We need to see what real persecution is, that we ourselves are not self-deceived and rejoicing and being glad when it is the result of our sin, rather than true persecution that God allows.

So by its very nature the term "persecution" speaks of the act of pursuing. It is used in 2 Timothy 2:22, "Pursue these godly things, Timothy. Chase after them." But here in Matthew it is a hostile pursuit. Now we see in Scripture that persecution comes in a large sense through either physical or verbal abuse, or a combination of both. A hostile pursuit of someone in a physical sense, we see that. We also see the hostile pursuit in a verbal sense. And if you look at the life of Paul before he was saved, (his name being Saul) we are given a pretty good picture of what persecution looks like. Let us turn for a minute to Acts 9 and we will take a look at that. But as you are turning there, I want to quote to you from 1 Corinthians 15:9, as Paul says, ***For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted*** (there is our word) ***the church of God***. He says the same thing in Galatians 1:13 and Philippians 3:6. He was a persecutor of the church. And in Acts 9 we have the account of his conversion. We see in Acts 9:1,

Matthew 5:10-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on (9/20/2009)

¹ **Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord,** (that is persecution) **went to the high priest,** ² **and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. [Acts 9:1-2]**

That is persecution; that is physical persecution and verbal persecution. And if you are wondering if that is really persecution or not, look down to verse 5 when he is confronted by the Lord whom he does not know. Here we see Jesus explain what Paul is actually doing. ⁵ **And he said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting..." [Acts 9:5]**

"You are persecuting Me. You are pursuing Me. You are pursuing My church, and you are persecuting Me" is what Jesus is saying. If you skip ahead to Acts 22, Paul is declaring and giving his testimony in Jerusalem. Acts 22:4-5, where we see Paul explain his former manner of life when he was zealous (and as a side note, most of the persecution you see in Scripture is by those who claim to know the Lord!). Acts 22:4-5,

⁴ **"And I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons,** ⁵ **as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished." [Acts 22:4-5]**

That is persecution, absolutely. Acts 26, as we skip forward a little bit. As Paul speaks before King Agrippa, again sharing his testimony. Acts 26:9,

⁹ **"So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.** (There is a hostility in this persecution right?) ¹⁰ **"And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ "And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried (notice he says "tried" but wasn't able to with the true believers) **to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities." [Acts 26:9-11]****

Now that is persecution. We see that the apostle Paul persecuted physically and verbally the true believers in Jerusalem. And he chased after those from city to city. But we also see that the apostle Paul was persecuted as well after he came to faith, that the Lord "might show him how much he would suffer for Him." Paul was persecuted too.

And folks, physical persecution is always aimed at God's true children. In Stephen's sermon before he was stoned in Acts 7, he makes it clear that the Jews who were about to persecute him to death had put Christ to death, that they were no different than their fathers who had persecuted and killed the prophets. Let's look back at Acts 7. Stephen did not shrink back at this point, he could have said, "You

Matthew 5:10-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on (9/20/2009)

know what, we could have a dialogue about your religion, we could talk about this or that. I am all things to all men. Hey, I am going to be your buddy right now.” He didn’t do that. He spoke the truth. Acts 7:51,

⁵¹ "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. ⁵² "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become;" [Acts 7:51-52]

And we know after that that they got really hot and upset at him and they stoned him to death. We see in the Old Testament, the Greek translation of the Old Testament that this same word “persecute” appears in Psalm 119:86. We see that we can be persecuted with words, and that is where we receive a majority of our persecution right now, it is with words. Certainly we can be persecuted by actions, as we might lose a job or something like that, but Psalm 119:86 says, **All Thy commandments are faithful;** (what a wonderful statement) **They have persecuted me with a lie; help me.** Lying lips persecuting true believers who love the Word of God.

And we see here in our passage, as you look down a little farther in our passage back in Matthew 5, we see verbal persecution, ¹¹ "Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me." [Matthew 5:11] That is persecution. That is persecution folks.

It is hostile pursuit in the context towards the body of Christ, the church, which is ultimately aimed at Jesus Himself, whether they know it or not. Paul did not know Him, “Who art thou?” And Jesus said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.” And at this point we see the reality of persecution for the true believer. We want to skip this point, we say “Oh, I don’t want to see the reality of persecution.” But it is true, we will be persecuted. Back to verse 10, ¹⁰ "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." [Matthew 5:10]

And as I have shared, true believers are those who are blessed. Continually, habitually living out the things we saw lived out in the first seven Beatitudes: totally dependent, mourning over sin, an internal gentleness based on a submission to God manifest for others. All of these things, clean hearts, continually habitually living these out, if you live them out because you are walk with Christ, then we are going to see that we are persecuted. When His righteous is manifest in you, you will be persecuted.

We see the Scripture declares that all who desire to live godly will be persecuted, 2 Timothy 3:12, it is going to happen. In 2 Timothy 3, the apostle Paul, revealing his reaction to persecution in light of those false teachers who were causing it, in light of it he says (for the purpose of encouraging Timothy “Besides the bad guys, Timothy”),

¹⁰ But you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, ¹¹ persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord

Matthew 5:10-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on (9/20/2009)

delivered me! ¹² And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. [2 Timothy 3:10-12]

If you desire to obey the Lord God, and there is a whole bunch of manifestations of that, obviously you are going to obey Him, serving Him how He has gifted you. You are going to obey Him, your life is not your own, you are going to do what He says. You are going to, and we are going to be persecuted. But why is it that a godly life brings persecution? Why would the world be so upset at those who are doing good? Why would they? Let's turn to John chapter 15 together and just take a peek at it. In John chapter 15 Jesus shares this with His disciples, starting in verse 18,

¹⁸ "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. ¹⁹ "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰ "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. ²¹ "But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me." [John 15:18-21]

A slave is not greater than his master. It is a fact that the world hates Christ. But why does the world hate Christ? Why do non-believers hate Christ? Turn back to John chapter 3, where the Lord Jesus addresses this. John 3:19,

¹⁹ "And this is the judgment, that the light (speaking of Christ) is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil ²⁰ "For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ "But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God." [John 3:19-21]

I will tell you right now, the world does not want to be around righteous people because their unrighteousness is manifest by virtue of your righteousness in Christ. This is because of righteousness, as we see in our passage, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness." It is righteousness, the righteousness of Christ in us that brings about persecution. If the world loves you then you are not going to be persecuted. If you are worldly, if you love the world then the world will love you and persecution will not happen. If we are not living righteously, because Christ is not being manifest by faith in Him through the Word of God and obedience, in the midst of a perverse generation there will be no persecution. And folks, if the world loves you, if everybody around you who loves you is not saved, then you have a terrible problem. If there are people around you who are not saved, whether it is a spouse, family, and they just love you no matter what, and they have never addressed anything, they have never been hostile towards you, you have a problem!

The Lord Jesus Christ says in Luke 6:26,

Matthew 5:10-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on (9/20/2009)

²⁶ "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for in the same way their fathers used to treat the false prophets." [Luke 6:26]

Woe to you when everybody thinks you are fine. Woe to you. "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness." In the Old Testament time unbelieving Jews who claimed to follow God killed the prophets. And "Woe to you when all men speak well of you." Jesus gives a general maxim here, when everybody loves you, you have a problem. Now sometimes not everybody loves you because you have been sinful, that is different. But for the true believer, those who are blessed, you will have been persecuted in some way shape or form. "Blessed are those who have been persecuted."

You know, even new believers recognize this. When you came to faith, if you truly came to faith, you recognize this. You were maligned by those you used to run with, as we see in 1 Peter chapter 4, and I will read this for you.

¹ Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. (living for the lusts of men, that is the world, living for the will of God, that is the true believer) ³ For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. ⁴ And in all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you; ⁵ but they shall give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. [1 Peter 4:1-5]

New believers who are truly saved, who have turned from their sin, will be different in the context of the relationships of those who did not know Christ, and they will malign you. You are going to experience persecution when you come to Christ. And the apostle Paul made it clear to the Thessalonians in the first three weeks of their salvation, "You are going to be persecuted." And I want to ask you, when someone shared the gospel with you, did they share the fact that persecution is coming around the corner, that it is coming? The apostle Paul did. 1 Thessalonians 2:13, a wonderful passage.

¹³ And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. ("Oh, we praise the Lord, Thessalonians, that you accepted it not as man's word but God's Word) ¹⁴ For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, ¹⁵ who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, ¹⁶ hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved; with the result that they always fill

Matthew 5:10-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on (9/20/2009)

up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost. [1 Thessalonians 2:13-16]

And if you go to chapter 3 of 1 Thessalonians he says in verse 1,

¹ Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone; ² and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith, ³ so that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. ⁴ For indeed when we were with you, (and Paul and his companions had only been with them three weeks after they were saved) we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know. [1 Thessalonians 3:1-4]

Paul said, "It is coming." If you trust in Christ, if you place your faith in Jesus Christ and are truly saved, you are going to be changed, you are going to have His life manifest in you, you are going to want to do what is right. And when you do, the world is going to persecute you. The apostle Paul tells the Philippians in Philippians 1,

²⁹ For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, ³⁰ experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me. [Philippians 1:29-30]

Brother and sister, if you come to Christ, those who don't know Christ are going to hate you, whether they say it or not, because they hate Christ whether they know it or not. It is because they do not want their deeds exposed. They do not want their evil deeds exposed. Blessed are those who *have been* persecuted for righteousness sake. Another pastor (Unknown) writes,

Persecution is one of the surest, tangible evidences of salvation. Persecution is not incidental to faithful Christian living but a certain evidence of it.

Friends, if you have never been pursued verbally or physically because of righteous living in Christ, I would question whether you are really saved. Blessed are you who have been persecuted, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. If you have an unsaved spouse and you came to Christ, and they have never said anything on account of Christ, I would wonder about that. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted." Have you ever been put down for trusting Christ in your life? Ever? I wonder if you are really saved. Examine yourself because the life of Christ may not be manifest. And if the life of Christ is manifest, you are going to be persecuted.

It comes in all kinds of different ways as we see, insults, verbal responses, false accusations. It can manifest in your work by not getting a promotion, whatever it might be. People speaking badly of you, ostracizing you, whatever it is, because you are following Christ. But I want to make it clear that it is not suffering because of sin. We need to make sure, because I am not speaking about suffering for sin.

Matthew 5:10-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on (9/20/2009)

Suffering for being a jerky Christian. Like suffering for proclaiming the gospel when you should be working. You have been called to work but you spend your time sharing the gospel, that is not obeying God. God says, "Do your work heartily unto Me." Suffering for acting self-righteously towards the world around you who can do nothing but be unrighteous.

I am not talking about being persecuted for sin. Parents, I am not talking about being persecuted because you exasperated your children. I am not talking about when the world gets upset at you because of religious-political dogma. I am talking about the righteous life of Christ manifest in day-to-day actions, the things we saw in those first seven Beatitudes. They will bring about persecution.

As it was read earlier in 1 Peter that we shouldn't suffer as an evil-doer, a troublesome meddler. We should be suffering for Christ, which means we are suffering not because we are running around with some banner pushing it in peoples' faces; we should be suffering for righteousness sake. Let us take a look at that, let's review the right reason for persecution in verse 10, "¹⁰ "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs (present tense) is the kingdom of heaven." [Matthew 5:10]. You are in the kingdom. And remember, this is not the gospel, it is an evidence of whether we have received the gospel.

1 Peter 3:13,

¹³ **And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?** ¹⁴ **But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness,** (right behavior, the righteous behavior of Christ manifest in your life, doing what He has declared by faith through the power of His Spirit. And look at what he says) **you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled,** (later on we are going to see that we should rejoice and be glad. But instead of fearing and being troubled, in the context of righteously bearing persecution which will come upon the true believer) ¹⁵ **but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts,** (set Him apart as Lord) **always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you** (that doesn't mean defending Christ to everyone you come across, but when they ask you) **to give an account for the hope that is in you,** (how can you have this hope in the midst of such wickedness?) **yet with gentleness and reverence;** ¹⁶ **and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered,** (notice that is verbal persecution) **those who revile your good behavior** (it is for righteousness' sake, your behavior) **in Christ may be put to shame.** ¹⁷ **For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. [1 Peter 3:13-17]**

It is for the sake of righteousness. The reason why persecution comes upon true believers is for the sake of righteousness. And later on in verse 11 Jesus parallels this statement and says "...on account of Me." When we suffer for the sake of righteousness, we are suffering because of Christ. Just as we saw in the first seven Beatitudes, the blessed man, one who has a saving relationship with Christ, who continually exhibits (habitually) His righteousness, not perfectly because we do sin, but exhibits His righteousness,

Matthew 5:10-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on (9/20/2009)

will be persecuted. When because of faith in Christ, His Word dwelling richly in you and you do what is right, for the true believer, you are going to be persecuted. People are going to say things about you, they are going to mock you. And often times that persecution comes through those who claim to know Christ but are really (as we see through their fruit) make-believers, worldly Christians or make-believers.

On a side note, brothers and sisters, God does use the world's persecution to benefit us, to manifest Christ in our life. In 2 Corinthians 1 the persecution that Paul had experienced (bringing him to the point of death) was used so that he would not trust in himself but the God who raises the dead, to bring about faith. And then as it was read in 2 Corinthians 4, all these things that happen - "Persecuted, but not destroyed, not struck down." All of this stuff was so that in this almost dying by them, it would manifest the life of Christ. God is manifest through the life of this very persecution for his (Paul's) good and God's glory, as we see in 2 Corinthians 4.

And we do not want to hear this, but persecution is part-and-parcel for the true believer. A slave is not greater than his master. Who is your master? Who do you yield to everyday? Who is your master? Is it self? Do you wake up every morning and *self* drives your day? Who is your master? A slave is not greater than his master, and God uses it to keep us dependent on Him, that Christ might be manifest to a lost world.

There is a lot of talk about evangelism these days in churches, everybody wants everybody to get saved, but we don't see much righteous living, which will bring about persecution which will manifest Christ and give opportunities to give the hope that we have in Christ. Let me ask you this, and I will ask myself: Have you suffered for doing what is right? For trusting Christ, have you suffered lately? Have you ever suffered for doing what is right in the context of trusting Christ?

I want to share one more principle and then we will move forward. Again, as I shared, often we see in Scripture that persecution comes from those who claim to know Christ. But as you do what is right, it manifests that theirs is really lawlessness, so they persecute you. If you do what is right, the worldly church is going to hate you. If you do what is right. A slave is not greater than his master.

And folks, I find this to be true most of the time for me. And the world has spoken evil of me and the world has spoken evil of my wife. Whether it's worldly relatives, or whatever it is. But the worst evil that has been spoken of me personally has been from the *so-called* church. It happens when divisive people who have come and gone, people who have gone through the process of church discipline, people who are jealous, all kinds of worldly make-believers speak evil against those who are doing what is righteous. And folks, you are going to be persecuted if you follow Christ. But what does our glorious Beatitude say? "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake." Have you been persecuted for righteousness' sake? Not because of obnoxiousness or ungraciousness, not because of pushiness or being jerky towards people, for not doing your job. But have you been persecuted for righteousness? Is the life of Christ manifest in you?

Now why, ultimately, are we blessed? Verse 10 again, "¹⁰ 'Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, (and her is the answer) for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'" Theirs

Matthew 5:10-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on (9/20/2009)

,present tense, *is* the kingdom of heaven. Just like we saw in verse 3, the two brackets that bracket the Beatitudes, verse 3 and verse 10. Theirs right now, present tense, is the kingdom of heaven. They are of the kingdom, it is an evidence that they have been delivered from darkness into the kingdom of His beloved Son. Colossians 1:12,

¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, (that is the price paid for our sins) the forgiveness of sins. [Colossians 1:12-14]

I believe He is saying, “theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” speaking synonymously with being saved. It is an evidence, not the only evidence, but an evidence. Whether it is at work, you do your work well and people still speak badly against you. Maybe you do not get the promotion, whatever it is. Whether it is at home with a spouse, you do what is right, you stand up as a godly man and make Godly decisions and your spouse mocks you. Whether you are a godly wife and you do the right thing as you submit humbly and do the right thing and are mocked. Whether you are a child, doing the right thing, and your friends ostracize you, blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. It is an evidence you are in the kingdom.

Now at this point we have a wonderful statement as the Lord Jesus takes this one Beatitude and modifies it and personalizes it. And it is interesting that He only personalizes this Beatitude. He does not personalize anything before this, He personalizes this one which capstones everything. If you are blessed, living the way we saw in those first Beatitudes because Christ is in you, then you are going to be persecuted, and we have this encouragement from the Lord personally. “¹¹ Blessed are you (not *they*, *those* or *theirs*, but *you*,) when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. ¹² Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” [Matthew 5:11-12].

Blessed are you! It is a personal application of this. The Lord Jesus personally wanted to know that we are blessed when men do these things on account of Him. Not on account of our sin, but on account of Him. Blessed are you. And it is my view, and I am just speculating here, that He is just teaching the multitudes and He turns to His true disciples (because they would be persecuted) and He says, “Blessed are you when men cast insults at you.” And we need to be reminded of this, because it is difficult. When you do what is right it seems as though everything is against you but the Lord is with you. Blessed are you.

Now notice the term here says “when.” Blessed are you *when*. Praise the Lord for that term, it means that it is not happening all the time, right? When it happens. You are going to be persecuted, not all the time, but when it happens, blessed are you. And notice this personalization of it, it really focuses on the verbal element of it. “When men cast insults.” It speaks of unjustifiable verbal speech that can come in many contexts. It speaks of scolding, reviling or reprimanding speech. Unjustifiable verbal speech, casting insults at you, it is at you. You are blessed. And then He says (it is this same word here) “when

Matthew 5:10-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on (9/20/2009)

you are *persecuted*.” And He expands on that, when you are hostilely pursued and they say all kinds of evil against you falsely, they lie about you, a false witness, all sorts of manifested evil towards you, you are blessed (when people do this to you). Why? It is on account of Him.

The righteous life of Christ, if it is manifest in you, will produce persecution. We are going to be persecuted as a church; you are going to be persecuted individually. And Christ says, “Blessed are you.” It is the capstone of the evidence of one who is following Christ. Those who are not following Christ are just peachy with the world all around them. Everything is fine at work, everything is fine with your friends of the world, everything is fine with your unbelieving family. But for true believers, blessed are you.

But what I really am greatly blessed by here is that Christ has not ignored and will not ignore this persecution. Verse 12, ¹² “Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” [Matthew 5:12]

The righteous reaction to persecution is not “Oh, call the prayer chain...it is so awful!” It is not moaning and groaning, it is rejoicing! Rejoice and be glad! And we need to be commanded to do this, and He is going to tell us why. It speaks of exceeding joy. We have this same verse in Luke 6:23, the same teaching but at a different time.

²³ ***“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.” [Luke 6:23]***

Why should we rejoice when people cast insults at us? Our reward in heaven (it is another evidence that we are saved), it is a reward in heaven, we are a part of the heavenly kingdom, that reward is great. Your reward in heaven where God dwells is great. He is giving us a picture into the heavenlies which should motivate us to endure. Oh fellow believer, God is not unjust so as to not reward us greatly for the persecution He sovereignly allows to come upon us. For obeying Him, for trusting Him for the sake of righteousness.

Now although we do not fully understand, Scripture does give us some insight into rewards, and I am going to briefly share two passages and we will finish up here. First Corinthians chapter 3, the apostle Paul is deflating the pride and boasting of the Corinthians, pointing out that even he himself and Apollos are nothing, but it is God that does the work through the Word building up His church. 1 Corinthians 3:5,

⁵ ***What then is Apollos?*** (the Corinthians thought Apollos was a great guy, Paul was a great guy) ***And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed,*** (“We were just servants that shared the Word and you believed it.”) ***even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one.*** ⁶ ***I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.*** ⁷ ***So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything,*** (if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing he deceives himself, says Galatians 6) ***but God who causes the growth.*** ⁸ ***Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.*** (now we know Paul labored

Matthew 5:10-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on (9/20/2009)

according to the grace of God, not in his own strength) ⁹ **For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.** (that's the church) ¹⁰ **According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation,** (he is speaking of bringing the Word of God, the foundation through the apostles and prophets as it says in Ephesians 2) **and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it.** ¹¹ **For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.** ¹² **Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,** ¹³ **each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.** ¹⁴ **If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward.** ¹⁵ **If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire. [1 Corinthians 3:5-15]**

When Christ manifests His life through you, you are rewarded. When you try to do the work of church yourself, you suffer eternal loss. You are forgiven for your sins, but you lose something for all eternity, or in contrast you can gain something for all eternity. Second Corinthians 5:9,

⁹ **Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent,** (that is either dead or alive, either in the presence of the Lord or here on earth) **to be pleasing to Him.** ¹⁰ **For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ,** (speaking of believers) **that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. [2 Corinthians 5:9-10]**

We are forgiven. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, but there are rewards. And Jesus says here, "You are blessed when men cast insults at you, persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of me. Rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great." It is great. We are tempted to complain, but Jesus says to rejoice. There is great heavenly reward.

And then lastly He gives us one more encouragement, and it may not seem like an encouragement but it really is. "...for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." [Matthew 5:12b] Folks, the prophets who trusted God, obediently spoke His Word, (not like the false prophets) were persecuted. Those who followed Christ in obedience were persecuted. Rejoice and be glad because it is a powerful evidence that you are right on track. All of God's faithful prophets were persecuted, and if you are persecuted, rejoice and be glad for so they (the bad guys) did it to them also. You are right on track. Some strange thing is not happening to you. God is allowing it and willing it, ultimately for God. And it is an evidence that you know Christ.

There you have it, the culmination of the Beatitudes. Pronouncements of blessings that reveal what the righteous life really looks like. Now it is not completely across the board, but it is an evidence that Jesus chose in His sovereignty to display to these Jews who thought they were God's people. And if you laid these things across a non-believing Jew, they would fail them all. And maybe that is the case for you. Maybe the world speaks well of you. Maybe you have friends that don't know Christ and they have no

Matthew 5:10-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on (9/20/2009)

idea you do, and you are just buddy-buddy with them. Maybe you have never been persecuted for righteousness sake. Possibly it is an evidence that you don't know Christ the righteous. And Jesus is gracious to lay this before you, that you might not think you are saved and experience His eternal wrath. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness.

Let me ask you this, have you ever been persecuted for righteousness sake? Has anyone said anything wrongly because you trusted Christ? Have you been persecuted at work, at home, with family, whatever it might be? Let me ask you one more question, how do those who do those who don't know Christ look at you? Woe to you when all men speak well of you.

Are you in a worldly church? The church that acts like the world, brings the world in? Is everything going well with you and them? If you are in a church that is worldly and everything is fine there, woe to you. I would examine yourself. Something is terribly wrong when the worldly church is fine with you. Maybe you are hardened by sin, or maybe you need a Savior.

Some of you are truly saved, and you have experienced the conflict. And there is conflict for following Christ, deep conflict. There is persecution for speaking what is true. Some of you might be mad about what I shared about the church there. Sometimes we get hardened by sin. We get conformed to the world. We need to confess our sin and renew our minds. Maybe you are doubting your salvation right now, sin has crept in. Confess your sin and recognize that those who do not know Christ are going to hate you, they are going to hate you. But when this happens and they persecute you, rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great!

Kids, when you do what is right because of faith in Christ, and those around you don't treat you well, have bad things to say about you, don't dismay, rejoice and be glad. Mothers, when you are ostracized because you raise your kids in a righteous way, rejoice and be glad. When you don't participate in the gossip of the neighborhood, rejoice and be glad. For those of you with unsaved spouses, although your greatest desire is for their salvation, when you are put down for your faith in Christ, rejoice and be glad.

At work when you do what is right in the context of gentle humility and evil is spoken of you, when you don't compromise, you don't shrink back, when you don't enter into the wicked speech of those in the work place because of Christ, rejoice and be glad. Brothers and sisters, when you speak to worldly so-called Christians and make believers concerning the worldly church, and they speak evil of you, rejoice and be glad.

Elders and pastors, as you obey the Lord God, holding fast the faithful Word, teaching and preaching, addressing sin in the flock, inevitably you are going to be persecuted. Rejoice and be glad. It is par for the course.

"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Matthew 5:10-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on (9/20/2009)

Prayer

Lord God, thank You for Your Word. And it is hard to hear at times. It cuts through us. And Lord, You said in Your Word that those who are blessed have been persecuted. And I pray for anyone here who truly has never been persecuted, no one has ever said anything wrong to them or about them because there has been no righteousness manifested, that the world speaks well of them, everyone. I pray for those who are in worldly churches who are going with the flow, who name the name of Christ yet profane it week after week with their actions. I pray that You might convict them of their sin and their state before You and if they are not saved that they would humble themselves before You. Lord God, I pray for those of us who know You. It is tempting to resist persecution, to complain about it, to avoid it. Lord, help us to trust You and just do what is right for the sake of righteousness. Help us to speak righteously, godly, graciously and do what You ask us to do. And Father, I thank You that Your Word gives us this great encouragement, that we are to rejoice and be glad for our reward in heaven is great. Thank You for Your Word now, I pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

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