

THE BEATITUDES: Our King — His Kingdom — His Citizens

9. Blessed Are You When You are Persecuted

Matthew 5:10-12

Let's frame our study of the last of the Beatitudes with this reminder: Jesus is the Savior King of an everlasting Kingdom. He is the King on a Cross. Because Jesus is the King on a Cross, His Kingdom and the citizens of His Kingdom are shaped by the cross. His agenda and His government reflect and expresses His character. He has ways — He has values — that simply don't fit with the ways and values of fallen culture — in fact His Kingdom is radically counter-culture. THAT is crucial to our understanding of the last two Beatitudes!

His ways — His values are **formed in** and **expressed through** the lives of the men and women who have embraced His rule. THAT is crucial to our understanding of the **last two Beatitudes**.

It is through the transformed lives of redeemed men and women that the ethos of the Kingdom of heaven invades the earth! THAT is crucial to our understanding of the last two Beatitudes because the world that is organizing itself without God and against God inevitably pushes back against the rule of God and those who have embraced His rule.

Matthew 5:10–12 (ESV) ¹⁰“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones — *“Here, AGAIN, I think we are entitled to say that we are confronted by one of the most searching tests that can ever face us.”*

TESTIMONY — *In my early 20's and mid-20's I got involved in church planting in the nation of Kyrgyzstan. I had a friend who was involved in ministry there after the fall of Communism. We got connected with a group of university students and young adults who were planting networks of churches across the nation of Kyrgyzstan. The thing that stood out to me the most was the final night of our trip where we were gathered with the leaders who were*

overseeing those house churches and those networks. We went around the room one-by-one and asked questions about what their faith meant to them. And somewhere in the conversation I asked a question: “Have you experienced any persecution at all for your faith?” And you could see them almost chuckle a little bit as they looked around the room to one another, and they almost seemed like it was like a ridiculous question, and so one-by-one they all replied, and they said, “Of course we’ve experienced persecution. This comes with following Jesus. Didn’t Jesus tell us that we would experience persecution?” And so, I asked, “What sort of persecution?” And one of them said, “I was physically beaten by family members.” Another said, “I was disowned and cut off from my family.” And it went round one-by-one talking about how much following Jesus had cost them. And yet, they did it with joy, accepting this as a normal and expected part of their discipleship. And so, being there with a group of young people from the United States around their age and then seeing the cost they were paying, what a contrast. Well, fast forward several years and one of the most heartbreaking things that happened, some of those students who sat in that room and saw these inspiring stories and saw what it cost, fell away from Jesus and abandoned their faith when things got hard in their lives. It was like they almost had two different operating systems or understanding of what it is that the Gospel did. Those in Kyrgyzstan believed that Jesus was worth it, and they would pay any price and put up with any persecution to be faithful and loyal to him, and the Christians in the states seemed to think that Jesus was like an add-on who upgraded your life — made your life better, but if that disappeared, well then, they disposed of Jesus too.

As followers of Jesus, I think that we are moving into a time of history where we will face more and more persecution in following Jesus. We will experience more and more resistance within culture than ever before in following Jesus. More and more faith is being pushed out of the public square with pressures that come in different forms to “privatize” (if-you-would) our faith in Jesus. THAT is in direct opposition to the marching orders of our King to live as His disciples openly —

***Matthew 5:13–16 (ESV)** ¹³“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. ¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.*

¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

No small side note — Living openly as citizens of the Kingdom of life and light will actually precipitate persecutions.

Richard France — *The **distinctiveness** which **makes them the object of persecution** is then illustrated by the two images of salt and light; **each is essential** but has its necessary effect on its environment **only if it is both distinctive** from it and **yet fully involved** in it. So, disciples **must function in society** as an **alternative** and **challenging community**. It is **by** their visible goodness that they will bring glory to the God who has made them so.¹*

I won't presume to speak for you, but I will say that for me that I have found the Beatitudes so beautiful, so powerful, so searching more so than ever before. I have found them to be a searchlight into how limited and, in some ways flawed my understanding of the Kingdom of God has been is my own heart. And on a broader level the words of Jesus in these Beatitudes have exposed the underlying causes of how the church at large has misrepresented our King, His heart and His ways over the past year.

I pray that the words of Jesus in these last two Beatitudes will cause us to see opposition and persecution in a way that makes us lean into Jesus more than ever, rather than walk away from him.

As we look at these final Beatitudes Jesus tells us three things about persecution: WHAT it is, WHY it is and HOW we actually find joy in the midst of persecution.

Matthew 5:10–12 (ESV) ¹⁰**“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

FIRST — Jesus anticipates the persecution of those who embrace Him as Savior and King. I think that the average person would anticipate the opposite. After all, who would want to persecute someone who is truly humble and meek,

¹ France, R. T. (1994). [Matthew](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 910). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

compassionate, deeply and desperately wanting to be like Jesus, pure of heart, and making peace. Jesus says that such people actually elicit resistance rather than approval. Here's the deal — Persecution should not surprise Christians.

Persecuted — *to systematically organize a program to oppress and harass people—'to persecute, to harass'* ²

This makes me think of Saul of Tarsus in the book of Acts who was the architect of the systematic, organized violent persecution of the first Christians in Jerusalem.

Acts 8:1; 3 (ESV) ¹And Saul approved of his (Stephen's) execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles..... ³But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

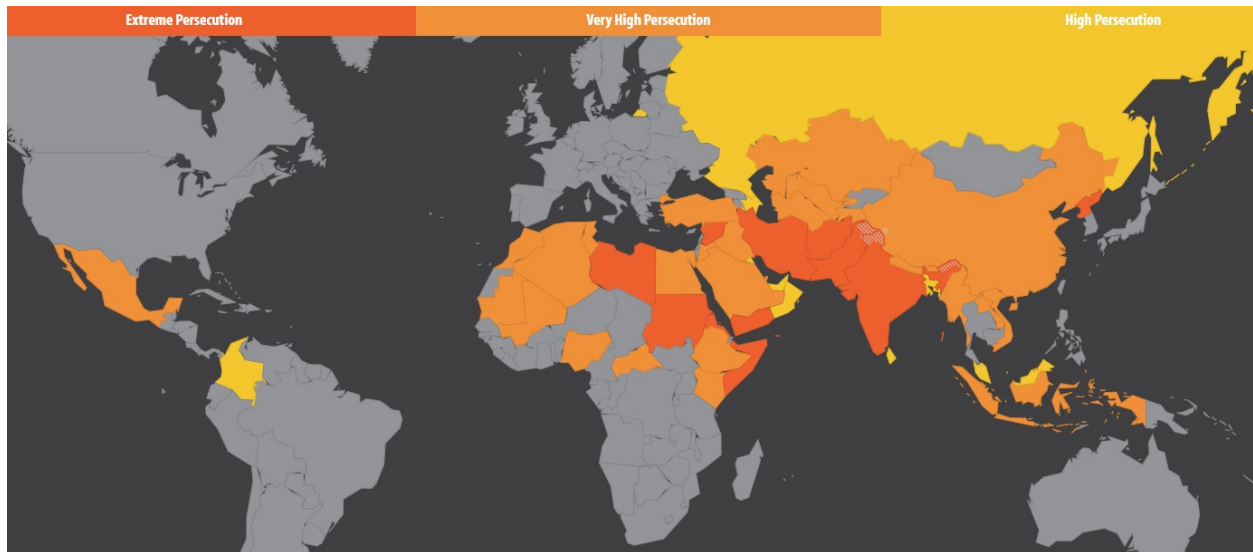
Acts 9:1–2 (ESV) ¹But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Acts 22:4–5 (ESV) ⁴I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, ⁵as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

This was a part of the experience of the early church. The Emperor Nero used to dip Christians in tar and set them on fire like torches in his palaces up on the Palatine Hill. Sometimes they would wrap Christians in sheep skins — put into the arena and the crowds would cheer as wild animals chased them down to eat them.

² Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [*Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 498). New York: United Bible Societies.

Christians have suffered violence ever since the book of Acts. But here's the thing — brothers and sisters in Christ are still suffering violent persecution today.



Persecuted — *those who are persecuted* is often translated “*those who receive suffering,*” so that this phrase can be “the people whom other people make suffer (or, persecute).³ So — “Blessed are those who are made to suffer.”

Jesus tells us WHY they are *made to suffer*.

Matthew 5:10–12 (ESV) ¹⁰“Blessed are those who are persecuted (made to suffer) for righteousness’ sake

QUESTION — What does this mean, *Persecuted for righteousness sake*? Again — the progression and the continuity of the Beatitudes is so beautiful.

In our study of the fourth Beatitude we learned that *righteousness* in the Bible has at least three aspects: legal, moral and social.⁴

Legal Righteousness is the right standing we have with God through faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:21–22 (NLT)**; **Philippians 3:9 (NLT)**). Without this righteousness we

³ Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992). [*A handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*](#) (p. 114). New York: United Bible Societies.

⁴ John Stott. “The Message of the Sermon on the Mount.”

would be forever lost. This righteousness — this right standing with God — is only possible because of the cross of Jesus ([2 Corinthians 5:21 \(NET\)](#)).

The Beatitudes (and the rest of the New testament) tell us that right relationship with God results in **Moral Righteousness**; a righteousness of character that is expressed in righteous living; a life in conformity to the heart and ways of the King. Being righteous, practicing righteousness, really means *being like Jesus* — being *Christ-like!*

D.A. Carson makes this observation — *there is no place for professed allegiance to Jesus that is not full of righteousness.*⁵

By nature of their right relationship with the King, Christians have a deep and desperate, profound and persistent desire to **do God's will** from the heart in every area of their life — to **be more like Jesus**. By the way, that is what the word “Christian” means. The followers of Jesus were FIRST called Christians in Antioch ([Acts 11:26](#)). The title wasn't given because of their dogma. They were called “Christian” because they were like Christ — followed Christ!

WHO has exemplified *Righteousness* on earth more than any other human? Jesus! In fact, in the New Testament the apostle John calls Him *Jesus Christ the righteous* ([1 John 2:1ESV](#)). Jesus Christ the righteous said:

[John 15: 20 \(NLT\)](#) Do you remember what I told you? “A servant is not greater than the master.” Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you....

REMEMBER — The ethos of heaven stands in radical contrast with the ethos of fallen culture. The sexual ethics of the Kingdom clash with the sexual ethics of fallen culture. If you hold to the historic Biblical position concerning human sexuality and marriage, you will experience resistance, opposition and even persecution. It's important to pause here and say that I think the church has not always done a great job in the way we have communicated our King's vision for human sexuality. The church has had sexual failures that discredit and rob us of our moral authority. Then there's the way the church has treated individuals who

⁵ Carson, D. A. (1999). *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10* (p. 30). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

are operating from the world's very broken view of gender and sexuality. We haven't always led with grace and with the heart of Jesus for them. We always want to get to grace. It is the heart of Jesus and the grace of Jesus that caused you and me to repent — to “go and sin no more.”

I believe we're to do all of that without compromising the fact that Christians have taught for 2,000 years that the only place of legitimate God-honoring sexual expression is in the life long, monogamous, covenant union between a man and a woman, and that's it. And any expression outside of that is sin. No matter how much compassion, no matter how much love, there's the line defined by Jesus. We choose to graciously, and boldly, make our stand there. As a church and as individuals we proclaim mercy; we proclaim the goodness of God — but we never compromise on those convictions. And WHEN we do — those organizing themselves without God will push back.

The same thing happens in the area of the exclusivity of Jesus. Jesus makes the claim that he alone is the only way to God, the only way to eternal life. We should love, respect and dialogue with those who might be Mormon or Jehovah's Witnesses, or Muslim or Hindu or Buddhists — but we can never walk back on the reality that Jesus is the only way to God! I encourage you to see what that kind of evangelism looks like in the book “Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus” — the story of how a Muslim, Nabeel Qureshi came to faith in Jesus. Nabeel met a Christian named David Wood in college. David became Nabeel's best friend — and over a period of four years loved Nabeel, had constant conversations about Jesus — yet never compromised on the exclusive claims of Jesus to be the only way to God.

We need to remember that the Good News — the Gospel — is at its core confrontational. Men and women do not want to be told that they are sinners needing a savior — and it gets even more confrontational when they hear that they can't pick and choose their savior — that there is only ONE Savior

***Acts 4:12 (ESV)** ¹²And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*

The claims of Jesus to be the exclusive way to be saved will produce resistance. *How dare you? Who do you think you are? That's so ignorant, that's so intolerant.*

Bottom line — *If* we ARE the person described in the Beatitudes, and *If* we are living as God wants us to live, we must expect to be persecuted.

2 Timothy 3:12 (NLT) Yes, and EVERYONE who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus WILL SUFFER persecution.

We must be sure that our suffering isn't due to our own foolishness or disobedience. Sometimes, professing Christians are persecuted because they are just plain weird! They say, "I've really been suffering for my witness." "No! Actually you've been persecuted for weirdness sake."

R. Kent Hughes — *Sadly, Christians are very often persecuted not for their Christianity, but for 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.*⁶

ONE MORE THOUGHT before we move on to the final Beatitude.

This is not just the grinding together of the tectonic plates of human systems and philosophies. The Scriptures teach that the fallen world is in the grip of a demonic entity who is referred to as the **g**od of this world

*2 Corinthians 4:4 (ESV) ⁴In their case the **g**od of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

This demonic entity — known in the Bible as Satan and our “adversary the devil” who is the enemy of the true and living God — which means that he is constantly waging war against those who love, trust and worship the true and living God. He is constantly waging war against the purposes of God — which means that he is constantly waging war against those who, because of their love for God, live to serve His purposes. We need to take that reality seriously.

⁶ R. Kent Hughes. The Sermon on the Mount

Our “adversary the devil” utilizes fallen culture to wreak havoc on those who love Jesus, follow Jesus, seek to live *for* Jesus and live *like* Jesus. Those who will proclaim the Good News about Jesus will be met by opposition driven by the god of this world.

So, Jesus says: *You’re going to have righteousness that offends the world, and you’re going to have loyalty to me that costs you something.*

QUESTION — Do we live in a way that clearly identifies our lives with Jesus? Do we look like Him enough to bear the same reproach He endured?

Matthew 5:11-12 (ESV) ¹¹“Blessed are **you** when others revile **you** and persecute **you** and utter all kinds of evil against **you** falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for **your** reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before **you**.”

It’s important for us to notice the change of address! In **verse 11** Jesus shifts from the normal structure of saying, *Blessed are the ___ for they...* to saying *Blessed are YOU!* The emphasis changes from the general to the personal. We, especially in America, often think of persecution as it relates to the Body of Christ at large. We tend to be very comfortable with the words, “*Blessed are THEY that are persecuted.*” We don’t even want to think in terms of *Blessed am I when I’m uncomfortable, let alone persecuted.*

NOTE IT WELL: The change of address was **DELIBERATE** on the part of Jesus. He could have kept speaking in reference to believers in general. But He didn’t! I can just picture Him looking right into the eyes of individuals in that multitude and saying, “*And blessed are YOU when they revile YOU and persecute YOU!*”

IN ESSENCE Jesus is saying, “*This is what is going to happen to you BECAUSE you are a Christian.... YOU are the person I just described.*”

Jesus talks about other kinds of persecution in this passage.

¹¹“Blessed are **you** when others revile **you** and persecute **you** and utter all kinds of evil against **you** falsely on my account.”

Jesus says, people will **revile** you

revile = strong verbal abuse.⁷ Jesus was reviled when He was hanging on the Roman cross.

***Matthew 27:44 (ESV)** ⁴⁴And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.*

One commentator notes that the Jews considered verbal abuse to be extremely vicious. The rabbis considered it as evil as idolatry, fornication, and bloodshed all combined. By defamation of character a person lost his place in the community and, according to the circumstance of that day, almost the possibility of continuing his life. **Revile** can be translated “say evil about” or “say you are bad.” Many translators in West Africa use the idiom “spoil your name.”⁸

Early Christians not only suffered horrific physical persecution — they were held in contempt and insulted for their faith in Jesus. In 1857 archaeologists discovered a piece of graffiti scratched in plaster on the wall of a room near the Palatine Hill in Rome. The image shows a young man worshipping a crucified man with the head of a donkey.

⁷ Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992). A handbook on the Gospel of Matthew (p. 115). New York: United Bible Societies.

⁸ Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992). [*A handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*](#) (p. 115). New York: United Bible Societies.



The Greek inscription translates to "Alexamenos worships [his] god". In other words, "Only an idiot would worship somebody who is crucified — Your Jesus is a donkey."

Peter echoes the words of Jesus about verbal abuse

1 Peter 4:14 (ESV) ¹⁴*If you are insulted (reviled) for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.*

¹¹**Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.**

A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew — "say bad things about you that aren't true" or "tell all kinds of wicked lies about you".⁹

They misrepresent what it is you actually believe or what you stand for, but they're labeled at you. You see so much in the ministry of Jesus, this sort of thing,

⁹ Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992). A handbook on the Gospel of Matthew (p. 115). New York: United Bible Societies.

the Pharisees always trying to strain out Jesus' words, trying to see if they could catch him in some way and then use what he said as an accusation against him, to distort it in a way that it didn't line up with his original ideas.

The early Christians wrestled with this. The Romans called Christians cannibals because they got together and they "ate the body and blood of Jesus." They spread rumors that Christians were going to abduct your children, or they were going to take you so they could eat you. They accused Christians of gross immorality because they gathered privately for a weekly "Love Feast". They were called revolutionaries because they wouldn't submit to the lordship of Caesar.

It seems like Christians are the only people that you can mock without consequence in our 21st century world. Try mocking a Muslim or a Jewish person or someone from the LGBTQ community and see what happens. But you can say virtually anything derogatory about Christians. You can openly deride them in culture.

A recent example of that is when Samaritan's Purse came to Manhattan at the front end of the Covid Pandemic. Hospitals were full. People were pleading for help and Samaritan's Purse shows up with a vision to literally serve people. But because they hold to the historic Biblical view of sexuality and marriage people began to unleash horrific verbal vitriol while the medical teams were literally holding their hands to the wounds of New York City in the name of Jesus. It just shows you the kind of shaming, the public shaming, that can happen when people follow Jesus.

Men and women who love Jesus, follow Jesus, live for Jesus and live like Jesus are going to feel that more and more. THAT is a verbal form of persecution.

11" Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account

on my account "because you are my followers." ¹⁰ We will see more of this when we get to the description of the believer as *SALT* and *LIGHT*.

¹⁰ Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992). A handbook on the Gospel of Matthew (p. 115). New York: United Bible Societies.

Luke 6:26 *Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets.*

¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

¹²Rejoice and be glad —

F.F. Bruce — A strong word ... from to leap much, signifying irrepressible demonstrative gladness ... It is the joy of the Alpine climber standing on the top of the snow-clad mountain.”

In His own words Jesus tells us HOW we actually find joy in the midst of persecution. He gives us only one reason for us to rejoice under persecution: Our **reward is great in heaven.**

reward tells us that God’s goodness overflows toward the persecuted.

Great has the sense of remarkable — out of the ordinary in degree, magnitude or effect.

heaven locates our great reward

THESE WORDS ARE HUGE! The King tells His citizens that the way for us to have the joy of an Alpine climber standing on the summit is for us to determine our values from the perspective of eternity. Jesus builds on this later in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 6:19–21; 33 (ESV) ¹⁹*“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.... ³³But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

The apostle Paul echoes the words of Jesus —

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 (NKJV) ¹⁷For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, ¹⁸while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

In every age God's people are under the gun. Our suffering under persecution — persecution prompted by our righteousness — tells us that the kingdom is ours.

My whole outlook upon everything that happens to me should be governed by these three things: **1.** My realization of who I am: A redeemed rebel and adopted child of God all because of Jesus. **2.** My consciousness of where I'm going: I am headed for an eternity in a new heaven and a new earth. **3.** My knowledge of what awaits me when I get there: JESUS!!

My ability to rejoice and be glad in persecution is the outcome of knowing that JESUS IS WORTH IT!!