



Part 27: Blessed are the persecuted

Matthew 5:10-12

Here today in the eighth Beatitude, with Jesus' extended commentary, we are confronted with the words of our Lord that are sobering, frightening, and probably disorienting to us in the West.

Jesus tells us to expect persecution and to rejoice in it when it comes! Could anything Jesus says be a clearer call to live in a radically different kingdom than the ways of this world?

I. Persecution for Following Jesus is Normal Christianity

A. Expect Persecution (John 15:18-21; Acts 14:22; Philippians 1:29-30; 2 Timothy 3:10-13; 1 Peter 4:12-17).

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

“It surprises us that goodness described thus far in the Beatitudes will be rewarded with persecution...and yet [we are taught] that people should expect persecution if they seek justice, and that Christians in particular should expect bitter unpopularity if they are really Christians.” – Dale Bruner

Why persecution?

“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.” John 15:18-20

By the “world,” Jesus is referring to the fact that fallen, unregenerate human society naturally seeks to organize itself without God.

“The world is the collective momentum and values of human sin that, brought together, have a force behind them that is very hard to resist...It’s the system of fallen humanity that is committed to making life work without God.” – John Eldredge

When the Kingdom of God begins to invade a sphere of human activity, there is resistance (Matthew 10:34-36; Luke 2:34-35).

“The coming of the kingdom means a permanent confrontation of worlds. The kingdom is a question mark in the midst of the established ideas and answers developed by people and societies.” – Mortimer Arias

“Persecution is simply the clash of two irreconcilable value systems.” – John Stott

Jesus’ climax at the end of the beatitudes is exactly this: stand faithful and do not get blown about by the ideologies of the world.” – Glen Stassen

B. Rejoice in Persecution (Romans 5:3-5; James 1:2-4).

“Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Matthew 5:12

“What a ghastly prospect! It makes one ask in all seriousness how Jesus could ever have gained disciples with an appeal like that. And then does it not sound like sheer mockery for him to go on and say, in the face of the tortures of body and soul to which they were actually exposed, ‘Rejoice and be glad!’ If that is not mockery (and surely it cannot be that) then there must be some great mystery here which we do not see.” – Helmut Thielicke

Why rejoice?

1. Our suffering is proof that we really do belong to King Jesus (“because of me”).

2. Our suffering means that we are sharing in Jesus' sufferings in his mission to rescue his groaning creation from Satan, sin and death (Romans 8:17-27; Philippians 1:29-30; 3:10-11; 2 Corinthians 1:5; 1 Peter 4:13).
3. Our suffering keeps us hoping in the right future and right rewards rather than expending our best energy pursuing only this world (1 John 2:15-17; James 4:4-6).

II. A Supernatural Rejoicing

"The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name." Acts 5:41

June 29 is Pray for the Persecuted Church Day. See GCC-sponsored Church planters with Petros to pray for on the art wall in the foyer.

Recommended Resources:

The Voice of the Martyrs (www.persecution.com)

International Christian Concern (www.persecution.org)