Blessed!

A Study on the *Beatitudes* of Jesus

As of 8/2/20

**Part 9 The Exposition of Matthew 5:1-12- continued**

**Matthew 5:1-12**

**1 When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him.**

**2 He opened His mouth and *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.**

**11 "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.**

**12 "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

**The Blessedness of Persecution**

**Matthew 5:10-12**

**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 *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.**

**12 "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

Now of all the Beatitudes, this last one seems the most contrary to human thinking and experience. The world does not associate “Blessedness” with Humility; or Mourning over Sin; or Gentleness; or Righteousness; or Mercy, or Purity of Heart; or Peacemaking Holiness. But it certainly does NOT associate being blessed by God with Persecution.

Several years ago a popular national magazine took a survey to determine the things that make people Happy And, according to the responses they received, “happy people” enjoyed other people- but were NOT Self-sacrificing; they refused to participate in any negative feelings or emotions about themselves; and they had a very high “Sense of Accomplishment” based on their own Self-sufficiency.

The person described by those Principles is completely contrary to the kind of person the Lord says will be authentically Happy Jesus says a “blessed” person is NOT one who is “Self-sufficient” but one who recognizes his own Emptiness and Need; a person, who comes to God as a Beggar, knowing he has no Resources in himself. He is NOT confident in his own ability- but is very much aware of his own Inability. Such a person, Jesus says, is NOT at all “positive” about himself but mourns over his own Sinfulness and isolation from a holy God.

Jesus and the Bible teaches that, to be genuinely Content- a person must NOT be Self-*serving* but Self-*sacrificing*. He must be Gentle; Merciful; Pure in Heart; Yearn for Righteousness; and must seek to make Peace on God's Terms- even if those Attitudes cause him to suffer.

The Lord's opening thrust in the Sermon on the Mount climaxes with this great and sobering Truth: those who faithfully live according to the first seven Beatitudes are guaranteed at some point to experience the eighth. Those who live Righteously will inevitably be persecuted for it. Godliness generates Hostility and Antagonism from those in the world. So, the crowning Feature of the happy person is Persecution! Kingdom people are *rejected* people. Holy people are singularly **blessed**, but they pay a price for it.

The last Beatitude is really two in one, a single Beatitude repeated and expanded. The word, “**Blessed”** is mentioned twice (vv. 10, 11), but only one characteristic (**persecuted**) is given, although it is mentioned three times, and only one result (**for theirs is the kingdom of heaven**) is promised. So, the word, “**Blessed”** is repeated to emphasize the generous Blessing given by God to those who are persecuted. *"Double-blessed are those who are persecuted,"* Jesus seems to be saying.

Now there are three distinct Aspects of “Kingdom Faithfulness” that are spoken of in this Beatitude:

1. The Persecution
2. The Promise
3. The Response

**The Persecution**

**“Those who have been persecuted”** are the citizens of the Kingdom: those who live out the previous seven Beatitudes. And, to the degree that they fulfill the first seven- they may experience the eighth.

**2Timothy 3:10-17**

**10 Now 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 rescued me!**

**12 Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.**

**13 But evil men and impostors will proceed *from bad* to worse, deceiving and being deceived.**

**14 You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them,***

**15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.**

**16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;**

**17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.**

**Persecution is a Mystery**

One of the greatest Mysteries in all the Bible is the Issue of Persecution- which is but one manifestation of the greater Issue of Suffering. Other manifestations of Suffering that the Bible speaks about include:

* **Trials** (*peirasmos* Strongs #3986) An experiment; attempt; trial; proving
* **Tests** (peirazoo; Strongs #3985) To try whether a thing can be done; to determine one’s faith; virtue; or chracter
* **Afflictions** (Hebrew *ra*; Strongs #7451) an evil; a distress; injury; calamity
* **Tumults** (*akatastasia*; Strongs #181) instability; a state of disorder; a disturbance; or confusion

**1Peter 1:6-9**

**6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,**

**7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;**

**8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,**

**9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of 1your souls.**

**John 6:6**

**This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do.**

**Psalms 34:19**

**Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the Lord delivers him out of them all.**

**2Corinthians 6:4-10**

**4 but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in**

**afflictions, in hardships, in distresses,**

**5 in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger,**

**6 in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love,**

**7 in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left,**

**8 by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; *regarded* as deceivers and yet true;**

**9 as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death,**

**10 as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.**

Many people ask, *“Why is it God’s Will for His Own children to suffer? If God is “Good” and if God is all Powerful (Omnipotent), why doesn’t He prevent Suffering from touching those He loves and saved?”* Or, *“Why would it be God’s Will to allow Suffering to come to His Own?”* What Purpose does it serve for God to allow Suffering to come to His children?

Sadly, many have sought to answer this Mystery by *manufacturing* a false doctrine that says, *“God doesn’t do this- satan does.”* But, in their effort to solve the Mystery, they have attacked and diminished the Doctrine of God’s absolute Sovereignty.

**2Timothy 3:12**

**Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted**

… and before writing those words Paul had just mentioned some of his own

**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 rescued me! (2Timothy 3:11)**

As one who lived the Kingdom Life- Paul had been persecuted, and all others who live the Kingdom Life can expect similar treatment. What was true in ancient Israel is true today and will remain true until the Lord returns.

**As at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also (Galatians 4:29).**

Imagine a man who accepted a new job in which he had to work with *especially* profane people. When at the end of the first day his wife asked him how he had managed, he said, *"Terrific! They never guessed I was a Christian."* As long as people have no reason to believe that we are Christians, at least obedient and righteous Christians, we need not worry about Persecution. But as we manifest the godly Standards of Christ- we will share the Reproach of Christ. Those born only of the Flesh will persecute those born of the Spirit.

To live for Christ is to live in *opposition* to Satan in his world and in his system. Christlikeness in us will produce the *same* results as Christlikeness did in the Apostles, in the rest of the early Church, and in believers throughout History. Christ living in His people today produces the same Reaction from the world that Christ Himself produced when He lived on earth as a Man.

Righteousness is confrontational, and even when it is not preached in so many words, it confronts Wickedness by its very contrast. Abel did not preach to Cain, but Abel's righteous Life, typified by his proper Sacrifice to the Lord, was a constant Rebuke to his wicked brother- who, in a rage, finally slew him. When Moses chose to identify with his own despised Hebrew people rather than compromise himself in the pleasures of pagan Egyptian society- he paid a great price. But he considered…

**… the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt" (Hebrews 11:26).**

The Puritan writer Thomas Watson said of Christians:

"Though they be never so meek, merciful, pure in heart, their piety will not shield them from sufferings. They must hang their harp on the willows and take the cross. The way to heaven is by way of thorns and blood .... Set it down as a maxim, if you will follow Christ you must see the swords and staves"[[1]](#footnote-2)

Girolamo Savonarola (September 1452- 23 May, 1498) was one of the greatest Reformers in the history of the Church. In his powerful Condemnation of personal Sin and ecclesiastical Corruption, that Italian preacher paved the way for the Protestant Reformation, which began a few years after his death. One biographer said,

"His preaching was a voice of thunder… and his Renunciation of sin was so terrible that the people who listened to him went about the streets half-dazed, bewildered and speechless. His congregations were so often in tears that the whole building resounded with their sobs and their weeping."[[2]](#footnote-3)

But the people and the visible Church of that time could not long abide such a witness, and for preaching uncompromised Righteousness, Savonarola was convicted of "heresy;" he was hanged, and his body was burned.

Persecution is one of the surest and most tangible evidences of Salvation- because Persecution is not incidental to faithful Christian living- it is certain Evidence of it. Paul encouraged the Thessalonians by sending them Timothy,

**"so that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know" (1Thessalonians 3:3-4).**

Suffering Persecution is part of the normal Christian Life (cf. **Romans 8:16-17**). And so, if we *never* experience ridicule, criticism, or rejection because of our Faith, we have reason to examine the genuineness of it.

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

… so, Persecution for Christ's Sake is a Sign of our own Salvation just as it is a Sign of Damnation for those who do the persecuting (v. 28).

Whether Christians live in a relatively protected and tolerant Society or whether they live under a godless, totalitarian Regime, the world will find ways to persecute Christ's Church. To live a redeemed Life to its fullest is to invite and to expect Resentment and Reaction from the world.

The fact that many professed believers are popular and praised by the world does not indicate that the world has raised its Standards but that many, who call themselves by Christ's Name, have lowered theirs. As the time for Christ's Appearing grows closer- we can expect opposition from the world to *increase*, not decrease. When Christians are not persecuted in some way by Society it means that they are *reflecting* rather than *confronting* that Society. And when we please the world- we can be sure that we grieve the Lord.

**James 4:4**

**You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.**

**1John 2:15-17**

**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.**

**16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.**

**17 The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.**

So, Jesus said,

**Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.**

… and the word, **“when”** (‎*hotan*‎) can also mean, “whenever.” And the idea conveyed in the term is not that believers will be in a constant state of opposition, ridicule, or persecution, but that, whenever those things come to us because of our Faith, we should not be surprised or resentful. Jesus was not *constantly* opposed and ridiculed, nor were the Apostles. There were times of Peace and even Popularity. But every faithful believer will at times have *some* resistance and ridicule from the world, while others, for God's Own Purposes, will endure more extreme Suffering. But whenever and however Affliction comes to the child of God, his heavenly Father will be there with him to encourage and to bless. Our responsibility is not to seek out Persecution, but to be willing to endure whatever Trouble our Faithfulness to Jesus Christ may bring, and to see it as a Confirmation of true Salvation.

Now the way to avoid Persecution is obvious and easy. To live like the world, or at least to "live and let live," will cost us nothing. To mimic the world's Standards, or never to criticize them, will cost us nothing. To keep quiet about the Gospel, *especially* the Truth that apart from the Gospel’s saving Power- men remain in their sins and are destined for Hell, will cost us nothing. To go along with the world, to laugh at its jokes, to enjoy its entertainment, to smile when it mocks God and takes His Name in vain, and to be ashamed to take a stand for Christ will never bring Persecution. Those are the habits of sham Christians.

**Political Persecution**

Now there is a phenomenon that occurs mostly in the United States called, “Political Persecution”. And this is when Conservatives persecute Liberals or when Liberals persecute Conservatives, or when both hard-core Liberals and Conservatives persecute Moderates. Most of the time, Persecution stemming from a political position, although genuine Persecution, is NOT what Jesus was talking about. This is simply political differences hashing it out in the public arena and is a derivative of a free society.

However, there are *some* political positions that are based on a firm conviction as a believer- such as:

* Abortion
* Homosexual “Marriage”
* Perversions of Human Sexuality
* Women in Combat
* The Destruction of the Family
* The Absence of Fathers in the Home

… these are political and social Issues that stem from applying the Truth of the Word of God to our lives in the public square. And as genuine believers actually obey the Teachings of Jesus and the Apostles (NT) and the Prophets (OT), we run into Persecution from those who either don’t believe the Bible is true or those who do not want the Bible to be the Standard in American society. And so, to whatever extent believers are persecuted for these Issues (and others like them)- this constitutes *exactly* what Jesus was talking about. But for people to simply disagree with us about a political Issue- or to exert some level of Persecution (mostly verbal) against us because of a political position we take- is NOT what Jesus was talking about- and should NOT be viewed as such.

 We must always remember that it is possible to be a Conservative without being saved. It is possible to defend and promote certain “moral” Issues- without ever experiencing the Miracle of the New Birth. Jesus’ statements here in the Beatitudes are addressed to either people who are already saved or people who will be saved- not merely Conservatives or those who defend certain social Issues we agree with.

 Christians in the United States have experienced an unprecedented amount of Freedom and Liberty for over 240 years that is truly the envy of the world. The Church and Christianity in general; and individual believers in specific have not only NOT experienced the “normal” level of Persecution, but have actually been promoted and favored. What we see now in the rising level of Hostility towards the Church and believers is the result of the American Culture becoming more and more pagan- and that trend will probably continue. It is possible that God will see fit to remove the Constitutional Protections and Favor that the Church has enjoyed and we will see an end to the reprieve we have enjoyed in this Country. If that happens, we will merely be subjected to the very same level of Hostility that Christians in the rest of the world have always endured. So, while it is true that we may lose our Country- we will NOT lose the Church.

 But, for the genuine believer, Jesus does not take Faithlessness lightly.

**Luke 9:26**

**For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.**

If we are ashamed of Christ, He will be ashamed of us. Christ also warned,

**Luke 6:26**

**Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for in the same way their fathers used to treat the false prophets.**

… to be popular with everyone is either to have compromised the Faith or not to have true Faith at all.

Though it was early in His Ministry, by the time Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount He had already faced tremendous opposition. For example, after He healed the man on the Sabbath,

**"the Pharisees went out and immediately began taking counsel with the Herodians against Him, as to how *they* might destroy Him" (Mark 3:6).**

We learn from Dr. Luke that these religious hypocrites were actually hoping Jesus would heal on the Sabbath **"in order that they might find reason to *accuse* Him" (Luke 6:7)**. They already hated His Teaching and wanted Him to commit an Act serious enough to warrant His arrest.

Our Lord made it clear from His earliest Teaching, and His opponents made it clear from their earliest reactions, that following Him was costly. Those who entered Jesus’ Kingdom would suffer for Him before they would reign with Him. That is the hard honesty that every Preacher, Evangelist, and Witness of Christ should exemplify. We do the Lord no Honor and those to whom we witness no Benefit by hiding or minimizing the true Cost of following Jesus.

The Cost of Discipleship is billed to believers in many different ways. For example, a Christian stonemason in Ephesus in Paul's day might have been asked to help build a pagan temple or shrine. Because he could not do that in good conscience, his Faith would cost him the work and possibly his job and career. A believer today might be expected to hedge on the quality of his work in order to increase company profits. To follow His conscience in Obedience to the Lord could also cost his job or at least a promotion. A Christian housewife who refuses to listen to gossip or to laugh at the crude jokes of her neighbors may find herself ostracized. Some Costs will be known in advance and some will surprise us. Some Costs will be great and some will be slight. But there are *always* Costs associated with following Jesus. And to the degree that we value Jesus; to the degree that Jesus has become the Treasure of the Universe- that is the degree to which we will be willing to suffer Persecution. And by the Lord's and the Apostles' repeated Promises, Faithfulness always has a Cost, which true Christians are willing to pay and which false converts are not. Contrast the willingness of genuine believers to endure Persecution with the example Jesus gave in his Parable of the “Four Kinds of Soil”

**Matthew 13:20&21**

**20 "The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy;**

**21 yet he has no *firm* root in himself, but is *only* temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.**

The second-century Christian leader Tertullian was once approached by a man who said,

“I have come to Christ, but I don't know what to do. I have a job that I don't think is consistent with what Scripture teaches. What can I do? I must live"

To that Tertullian replied,

 "Must you?"

Loyalty to Christ is the Christian's only true Choice for a true believer. To be prepared for Kingdom Life is to be prepared for Loneliness, Misunderstanding, Ridicule, Rejection, and unfair Treatment of every sort in this life.

We need to remember that in the early days of the Church, the Price paid was often the Ultimate. To choose Christ might very well mean choosing death by stoning; by being covered with pitch and used as a human torch for Nero; or by being wrapped in animal skins and thrown to vicious hunting dogs. To choose Christ could mean Torture by any number of excessively cruel and painful ways. That was the very thing Christ had in mind when He identified His followers as those willing to bear their Crosses. “Taking up our Cross and following Jesus” has no reference to some mystical Devotion. It is a clarion Call to be ready to die, if need be, for the Cause of Jesus.

**Matthew 10:34-39**

**34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.**

**35 "For I came to *SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER*, *AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER*, *AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW*;**

**36 and *A MAN*'*S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD*.**

**37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.**

**38 "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.**

**39 "He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.**

**Matthew 16:24-27**

**24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.**

**25 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.**

**26 "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?**

**27 "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and C*WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS*.**

In Resentment against the Gospel- the Romans invented charges against Christians, such as:

* Accusing them of being cannibals (because in the Lord's Supper they spoke of eating Jesus' Body and drinking His Blood.)
* Accusing them of having sexual orgies (because they had weekly “love feasts”)
* Accusing them of being homosexuals (because men greeted one another with a “holy kiss")
* Accusing them of setting fire to Rome (because they spoke of God's destroying the earth by fire)
* Accusing them of being revolutionaries (because they called Jesus, “Lord and King” rather than the Emperor)

By the end of the first Century, Rome had expanded almost to the outer limits of

the known world, and unity became more and more of a problem. Because only the Emperor personified the entire Empire, the Caesars came to be deified, and their worship was demanded as a unifying and cohesive influence. It became compulsory to give a verbal oath of Allegiance to Caesar once a year, for which a person would be given a verifying certificate, called a “libellus.” After publicly proclaiming, "Caesar is Lord" the person was free to worship any other gods he chose. Because faithful Christians refused to declare such an allegiance to anyone but Christ, they were considered traitors- for which they suffered confiscation of property; loss of work; imprisonment; and often death. One Roman poet spoke of believers as

"the panting, huddling flock whose only crime was Christ."

In the last Beatitude Jesus speaks of three specific types of Affliction endured for Christ's sake:

1. Physical Persecutions
2. Verbal Insults
3. False Accusations

**Physical Persecutions**

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

Here, Jesus says, we can expect Physical Persecution. **Have been persecuted** (v. 10), **persecute** (v. 11), and **persecuted** (v. 12) are from ‎*diœkœ*‎, which has the basic meaning of *chasing, driving away, or pursuing*. From that meaning developed the connotations of Physical Persecution, Harassment, Abuse, and other Unjust Treatment.

All of the other Beatitudes have to do with inner Qualities, Attitudes, and spiritual Character. The eighth Beatitude, however, speaks of external things that happen to believers, but the Teaching behind these results also has to do with Attitude. The believer who has the Qualities required in the previous Beatitudes will also have the Quality of willingness to face Persecution **for the sake of righteousness**.

He will have the Attitude of Self-sacrifice for the Sake of Christ. It is the lack of fear and shame and the presence of courage and boldness that says,

"I will be in this world what Christ would have me be. I will say in this world what Christ will have me say. Whatever it costs, I will be and say those things.”

The Greek verb is a passive perfect participle, and could be translated **"allow themselves to be persecuted"** The perfect form indicates a continuousness, in this case a continuous willingness to endure Persecution- if it is the price of godly living. This Beatitude speaks of a constant Attitude of accepting whatever Faithfulness to Christ may bring.

It is in the Demands of this Beatitude that many Christians break down in their Obedience to the Lord, because here is where the Genuineness of their Response to the other Beatitudes is most strongly tested. It is here where we are most tempted to compromise the Righteousness we have hungered and thirsted for. It is here where we find it convenient to lower God's Standards to accommodate the world and thereby avoid Conflicts and Problems that we know Obedience will bring.

But God does not want His Gospel altered under pretense of its being less demanding, less righteous, or less truthful than it is. He does not want witnesses who lead the unsaved into thinking that the “Christ life” costs nothing. A synthetic Gospel, a Man-made seed, produces no real Fruit.

**Verbal Insults**

Second, Jesus promises that “Kingdom Citizens” are “**blessed...when people insult you… and say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.** ‎Now the Greek word, *Oneidizœ* ‎carries the idea of reviling, upbraiding, or seriously insulting, and literally means to cast in one's teeth. So, to insult here is for people to throw abusive words in the face of an opponent- mocking them viciously.

Now to be an obedient “Citizen of the Kingdom” is to court verbal abuse and reviling. As He stood before the Sanhedrin after His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was spat upon, beaten, and taunted with the words

**"Prophesy to us, You Christ; who is the one who hit You?" (Matthew 26:67&68).**

… and as He was being sentenced to crucifixion by Pilate, Jesus was again beaten, spit upon, and mocked, this time by the Roman soldiers (**Mark 15:19&20**). Faithfulness to Christ may even cause friends and even family members to say things that cut and hurt deeply.

Paul told the Corinthian Church, whose members had such a difficult time separating themselves from the world,

**"For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men" (1Corinthians 4:9).**

Paul drew the expression "become a spectacle" from the practice of Roman generals to parade their captives through the street of the city, making a spectacle of them as trophies of war who were doomed to die once the general had used them to serve his proud and arrogant purposes. That is the way the world is inclined to treat those who are faithful to Christ.

And then, in a note of strong sarcasm to enforce his point, Paul continues,

"**We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you**

**are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor" (v. 10).**

Now what is interesting, is that most of the people in the Corinthian Church suffered none of the Ridicule and Conflict the Apostle suffered because they prized their standing before the world more than their standing before the Lord. In the world's eyes they were prudent, strong, and distinguished — because they were still so much like the world.

God does not call His people to be sanctified celebrities, using their worldly reputations in a self-styled effort to bring Him Glory; using their power to supplement His power; and their wisdom to enhance His Gospel. We can mark it down as a cardinal Principle that to the extent the world embraces a Christian Cause or person — or that a Christian Cause or person embraces the world — to that extent that Cause or person has compromised the Gospel and scriptural Standards.

If Paul had capitalized on his human credentials- he could have drawn greater crowds and certainly have received greater welcome wherever he went. Because his credentials were impressive.

"**If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more," he says. He was "circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee" (Philippians 3:4-5).**

He had been "caught up to the third heaven .... into Paradise" (**2Corinthians 12:2,4**) and had spoken in tongues more than anyone else (**1 Corinthians 14:18**). He had studied under the famous rabbi Gamaliel and was even a free-born Roman citizen (**The** **Acts 22:3,29**). But all those things the Apostle

**"counted as loss for the sake of Christ,... but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:7-8).**

He refused to use worldly means to try to achieve spiritual Purposes, because he knew they would fail.

The Marks of Authenticity Paul carried as an Apostle and Minister of Jesus Christ were his Credentials as a Servant and a Sufferer,

**"in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure" (2 Corinthians 11:23-27).**

The only thing of which he would boast was his own Weakness (**12:5**), and when he preached he was careful not to rely on **"superiority of speech or of wisdom" (1Corinthians 2:1**), which he could easily have done.

**"For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" he told the Corinthians. "And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (1Corinthians 2:2-5).**

We live in a day when the Church, more than ever before, is engaged in Self-glorification and an attempt to gain worldly Recognition that must be repulsive to God. When the Church tries to use the things of the world to do the Work of Heaven, it only succeeds in *hiding* Heaven from the world. And when the world is pleased with the Church, we can be sure that God is not. We can be equally sure that when we are pleasing to God, we will NOT be pleasing to the system of Satan.

**False Accusation**

Third, faithfulness to Christ will bring enemies of the gospel to **say all kinds of evil against you because of Me**. So, whereas **insults** are abusive words said to our faces, these evil things are primarily abusive words said behind our backs. Those who despised Jesus said of Him,

**"Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners" (Matthew 11:19).**

… if the world said that of the sinless Christ, what things can His followers expect to be called and accused of?

Slander behind our backs is harder to take partly because it is harder to defend against than direct accusation. It has opportunity to spread and be believed before we have a chance to correct it. Much harm to our reputations can be done even before we are aware someone has slandered us.

We cannot help regretting slander, but we should not grieve about it. Rather, we should count ourselves to be “**blessed”**, as our Lord assures us we shall be when the slander is **on account of Me**.

Arthur Pink comments that

"… it is a strong proof of human depravity that men's curses and Christ's blessings should meet on the same persons"[[3]](#footnote-4)

We have no surer evidence of the Lord's Blessing than to be cursed for His Sake. It should not seriously bother us when men's curses fall on the very head that Christ has eternally blessed.

Now the central theme of the Beatitudes is Righteousness. The first two have to do with recognizing our own Unrighteousness, and the next five have to do with our seeking and reflecting Righteousness. The last Beatitude has to do with our Suffering **for the sake of righteousness**. The same Truth is expressed in the second part of the Beatitude as **on account of Me**. Now we must be aware that Jesus is NOT speaking of every Hardship, Problem, or Conflict believers may face in this life- but only those that the world brings on us *because of* Our Faithfulness to the Lord.

It is clear again that the Hallmark of the **blessed** person is **righteousness**. Holy living is what provokes the Persecution of God's people. And Persecution because of a Righteous life- is Joyous. Peter identifies such Experience as a “happy honor.”

**1Peter 3:13-18**

**And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. 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. For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.**

With those words, the Apostle extols the Privilege of suffering for Holiness, and thus of sharing in a small way in the same type of Suffering Christ endured. In the next chapter, Peter emphasizes the same thing.

**1Peter 4:12-14, 16, &19**

**Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you .... If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God .... Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.**

When we are hated, maligned, or afflicted as Christians, the *real* Animosity is not against us but against Christ. Satan's great enemy is Christ, and he opposes us because we belong to Jesus Christ, because He is in us. When we are despised and attacked by the world, the real target is the Righteousness for which we stand and which we exemplify. That is why it is easy to escape Persecution. Whether under pagan Rome, atheistic Communism, or simply a worldly boss, it is usually easy to be accepted if we will denounce or compromise our Beliefs and Standards. The world will accept us if we are willing to put some distance between ourselves and the Lord's Righteousness.

Now in the closing days of His Ministry Jesus repeatedly and plainly warned

His disciples of that Truth.

**John 15:18-21**

**"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. 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. 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. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me.**

The world went along for thousands of years before it ever saw a perfect man. Until Christ came, every person, even God's best, were sinful and flawed. All had “feet of clay.” To see God's people fail and sin is often taken as an encouragement by the wicked. They point a finger and say,

"He claims to be righteous and good, but look at what he did"

It is easy to feel smug and secure in one's sinfulness when everyone else is also sinful and imperfect. But when Christ came, the world finally saw the perfect Man, and all excuse for smugness and Self-confidence vanished. And instead of rejoicing in the sinless Man, sinful men *resented* the Rebuke that His Teaching and His Life brought against them. They crucified Him for His very Perfection, for His very Righteousness.

Aristides the Just (530-468BC) was banished from ancient Athens. When a stranger asked an Athenian why Aristides was voted out of citizenship he replied,

"Because we became tired of his always being Just."

… a people who prided themselves in Civility and Justice chafed when something or someone was *too* Just.

Because they refused to compromise the Gospel either in their Teaching or in their lives, most of the Apostles suffered a martyr's Death. According to tradition, Andrew was fastened by cords to a Cross in order to prolong and intensify his Agony. We are told that Peter, by his own request, was crucified head down, because he felt unworthy to die in the same manner as Jesus. Paul presumably was beheaded by Nero. Though John escaped a violent death, he died in exile on Patmos.

**The Promise**

But compared to what is gained, even a martyr's Price is small. Each Beatitude begins with **blessed** and, as already suggested, Jesus pronounces a double Blessing on those who are persecuted for the Sake of Righteousness, which is for His Own Sake. The specific Blessing promised to those who are so persecuted is that **theirs is the kingdom of heaven**! The Citizens of the Kingdom are going to inherit the Kingdom! Paul expresses a similar thought in **2Thessalonians 1:5-7**.

**This a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire.**

I believe and teach that the Blessings of the **Kingdom** are threefold:

1. Present
2. Future
3. Eternal

Jesus said,

**Mark 10:29-30**

**Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life"**

First, we are promised Blessings here and now. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife, and was imprisoned. But the Lord raised him to be the prime minister of Egypt and used him to save His chosen people from starvation and extinction. Daniel was thrown into a den of lions because of his refusal to stop worshiping the Lord. Not only was his life spared, but he was restored to his high position as the most valued commissioner of King Darius, and the king made a declaration that

**Daniel 6:26**

**in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel; for He is the living God and enduring forever**

Not every believer is rewarded in this life with the things of this life. But every believer is rewarded in this life with the Comfort, Strength, and Joy of His indwelling Lord. He is also blessed with the Assurance that no Service or Sacrifice for the Lord will be in vain.

There is also a future aspect to the Kingdom Blessing. When Christ comes back- we will be “co-regents” with Him over that wonderful, renewed earth

**The Revelation 20:4**

**Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I *saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.**

Finally, there is the Reward of the Eternal Realm- the Blessing of all Blessings of living forever in our Lord's Kingdom enjoying His very Presence. The ultimate Fruit of “Kingdom Life” is Eternal Life. Even if the world takes from us every possession, every freedom, every comfort, every satisfaction of physical life, it can take nothing from our spiritual life, either now or throughout Eternity.

The Beatitudes begin and end with the Promise of the Kingdom of Heaven (cf. v. 3). The major Promise of the Beatitudes is that “in Christ” we become kingdom Citizens now and forever. No matter what the world does to us, it cannot affect our possession of Christ's Kingdom!

**The Response**

**Matthew 5:12**

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

The believer's Response to Persecution and Affliction should not be to retreat and hide. To escape from the world is to escape Responsibility. Because we belong to Christ, we are no longer of this world, but He has sent us *into* this world to serve; just as He Himself came into this world to serve.

**John 17:14-18**

**14 "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.**

**15 "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil *one.***

**16 "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.**

**17 "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.**

**18 "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.**

We must remember that God has not called us to be “safe” or “secure”. God has called us out of great Darkness so that we may follow Jesus and become "the salt of the earth" and the "light of the world".

**Matthew 5:13-16**

**13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty *again?* It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.**

**14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;**

**15 nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.**

**16 "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and**

**glorify your Father who is in heaven.**

For our salt to flavor the earth and our light to lighten the world we must be active and busy and fruitful and faithful in the world. The Gospel is not given to be hidden but to enlighten.

When we become Christ's salt and Christ's light, our salt will sting the world's open wounds of Sin; and bring healing. And our light will irritate its eyes that are used to darkness- yet enlighten some. But even when our salt and light are resented, rejected, and thrown back in our face, we should **rejoice, and be glad**.

Now the phrase, **“Be glad”** is from the Greek word, ‎*agalliaœ*‎, which means: *to exult, to rejoice greatly, or to be overjoyed*, as is clear in the King James Version, **"be exceeding glad."** The literal meaning is: *to skip and jump with happy excitement*. Jesus uses the *imperative* mood, which makes His words more than a suggestion. So, believers are *commanded* to **be glad**. Therefore, not to be glad when we suffer for Christ's Sake is to be untrusting and disobedient.

The world can take away a great deal from God's people, but it cannot take away their Joy and their Happiness. We know that nothing the world can do to us is permanent. Evil people can only hurt us in this life. So, when people attack us for Christ's sake, we must realize that they are really attacking Him. The Apostle Paul said,

**Galatians 6:17**

**From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus.**

**2Corinthians 4:8-12**

**8 *we are* afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing;**

**9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;**

**10 always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.**

**11 For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.**

**12 So death works in us, but life in you.**

**2Corinthians 11:22-33**

**22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.**

**23 Are they servants of Christ? — I speak as if insane — I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death.**

**24 Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine *lashes.***

**25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep.**

**26 *I have been* on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from *my* countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren;**

**27 *I have been* in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.**

**28 Apart from *such* external things, there is the daily pressure on me *of* concern for all the churches.**

**29 Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?**

**30 If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness.**

**31 The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.**

**32 In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me,**

**33 and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and *so* escaped his hands.**

**Colossians 1:24**

**Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.**

… therefore, their attacks against us can do no more permanent damage than they did with Jesus.

But Jesus gives two reasons for our rejoicing and being glad when we are persecuted for His Sake. First, He says, **your reward in heaven is great**. Our present life is no more than

**"a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away" (James 4:14)**

… but **Heaven** is forever. And that’s why Jesus told us,

**Matthew 6:19-21**

**19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.**

**20 "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;**

**21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

Whatever we do for the Lord now- including suffering for Him- *especially* suffering for Him- reaps eternal Rewards.

Yet God's Rewards are not ordinary rewards. They are not only Eternal but are also **great**. So, since God **"is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that *we* ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20),** how much more abundantly is He able to grant what He Himself promises to us?

We often hear, and perhaps are tempted to think, that it is somehow

“unspiritual” and maybe even “Self-serving” to obey God for the sake of Rewards.

But that is one of the Motives that God Himself has given for striving to obey Him. Yet our motivation should be two-fold.

We should first of all, strive to obey Jesus- because we love Him. And this was part of why Jesus obeyed His Father- because He loved Him. Yet the Bible is crystal clear that Jesus Himself also obeyed “for” or “because” of the great Rewards that God had promised to Him.

**Hebrews 12:1-3**

**1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,**

**2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, 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.**

**3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.**

We must realize that it is neither selfish nor unspiritual to do the Lord's Work for a motive that He Himself gives and that he Himself has followed in Christ.

Second, we are to rejoice because the world **persecuted the prophets who were before** us in the same way that it persecutes us. So, when we suffer for Christ's Sake, we are in the best possible company. To be afflicted for Righteousness's Sake is to stand in the ranks of the Prophets. Persecution is a Mark of *our* Faithfulness just as it was a Mark of the Prophets' Faithfulness. When we suffer for Christ's Sake we know, beyond a doubt, that we belong to God, because we are experiencing the same Reaction from the world that the Prophets experienced.

When we suffer for our Lord we join with the Prophets and the other saints of old who…

**Hebrews 11:35b-38**

**35 … were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection;**

**36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment.**

**37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated**

**38 (*men* of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.**

… so, even though the lost and unsaved world is not worthy of their company, every persecuted believer is worthy. To be persecuted verifies that we belong to that line of the Righteous.

The Assurance of our own Salvation does not come from knowing we made a

decision to “accept Jesus into our hearts” somewhere in the past. Rather, the Assurance that our Conversion was genuine- is found in the Life of Righteousness and joyful Obedience that came about in us- as a result of our Conversion. And suffering for the Sake of Christ is part of that Life. Many will claim to have preached Christ, cast out demons, and done mighty works for His sake, but will be refused Heaven.

**Matthew 7:15-23**

**15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.**

**16 "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they?**

**17 "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.**

**18 "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.**

**19 "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.**

**20 "So then, you will know them by their fruits.**

**21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter.***

**22 "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'**

**23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; *DEPART FROM ME*, *YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS*.'**

… yet none, who have suffered righteously for Jesus, will be left out.

The lost, pagan world cannot handle the Righteous Life that characterizes Kingdom Living. It is not understandable and acceptable to them, and they cannot stomach it even in others. “Poverty of spirit” runs counter to the Pride of the unbelieving heart. The repentant, contrite Disposition that mourns over Sin is never appreciated by the callous, indifferent, unsympathetic world. The meek and quiet spirit that takes wrong and does not strike back- is regarded as weak and silly, and it irritates the militant, vengeful spirit characteristic of the world. To long after righteousness is repugnant to those whose fleshly cravings are rebuked by it, as is a merciful spirit to those whose hearts are hard and cruel. Purity of heart is a painful light that exposes hypocrisy and corruption, and Peacemaking is a Virtue praised by the contentious, self-seeking world in words but not in heart.

John Chrysostom, a godly leader in the fourth-century Church preached so strongly against Sin that he offended the unscrupulous Empress Eudoxia as well as many Church officials. When summoned before Emperor Arcadius, Chrysostom was threatened with Banishment if he did not cease his uncompromising Preaching. His response was,

"Sire, you cannot banish me, for the world is my Father's house"

"Then I will slay you," Arcadius said.

"Nay, but you cannot, for my life is hid with Christ in God" came the answer.

"Your treasures will be confiscated" was the next threat, to which John replied,

"Sire, that cannot be, either. My treasures are in heaven, where none can break through and steal."

"Then I will drive you from man, and you will have no friends left!" was the final, desperate warning.

"That you cannot do, either," answered John, "for I have a Friend in heaven who has said, **'I will never leave you or forsake you.'"**

Chrysostom was indeed banished, first to Armenia and then farther away to Pityus on the Back Sea, to which he never arrived because he died on the way. But neither his Banishment nor his death disproved or diminished his claims. The things that he valued most highly not even an Emperor could take from him.

Amen.

This is what I believe. This is what I teach.

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Blair Bradley, Pastor/Teacher

The Covenant of Peace Church

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.

1. *The Beatitudes* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971], pp. 259-60 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. "Savonarola". University of Oregon. Winter 2015*. Retrieved 26 May 2018*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. (*An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950], p. 39). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)