

**“HAVE YOU BEEN PERSECUTED LATELY?”**  
**MATTHEW 5:10-12**

**INTRO.:**

1. Christ has always been completely honest with His followers.
  - a. He has never tried to pull the wool over any of His potential follower’s eyes.
  - b. He has never promised them a life of ease and luxury in which they would enjoy the esteem of their fellowmen.
  - c. He knew that if one truly chose to follow Him, their life would not be pleasant.
  - d. He knew that if we made the radical changes he calls for in the Sermon on the Mount and our lives became very different people would oppose us.
    - (1) The first 7 beatitudes Jesus tells us what a person’s life will look like when they put on these attitudes.
    - (2) Now in this beatitude, Jesus tells us how the world will respond to such a changed life.
2. Thus as we come to the final beatitude Christ left no doubt as to what the fate will be of one who chooses to be loyal to Him and His cause on this earth.
3. Whereas other men have sought to entice men to follow them with promises of fame and fortune – Christ came saying: Matt. 5:10-12: (Read).
4. If we had written the beatitudes, we would probably have ended on a positive note, or with some great statement.
  - a. ILLUST.: Vacuum salesman – Tells the good points about his product and ends his sales pitch.
  - b. But rather than making it sound nice, Christ ends with the truth.
  - c. Simply – when we adopt the attitudes of the beatitudes and our lives change – the world will not like us.
  - d. “The world never has, nor ever will take very kindly to one who lives his life by the standards of heaven, rather than the earth’s.”
5. This beatitude hits at the heart of one of the most neglected Biblical subjects in the religious world and even in the church today.
  - a. The simple truth is that every true Christian, everyone who truly lives for Jesus on a daily basis, **WILL BE** persecuted.
  - b. If the Bible had little to say on the subject of persecution, then we might be justified in saying that we do not need to talk about it.
  - c. But just the opposite is true for every book in the NT makes reference to the fact that Christians will either be opposed or persecuted.
  - d. Thus a constant theme of the Bible is that God’s children will be persecuted by the world.
  - e. NOTE: One thing that is promised even more than the fact that we will be persecuted, is that God will be with us.
6. Thus this last beatitude serves as a test.
  - a. If we live according to the first seven Beatitudes, we will automatically experience the eighth.
    - (1) It is like an equation - If you are the person of vs. 3-9, you will get the persecution of vs. 10-12.
    - (2) If you are “*poor in spirit*,” some will think you are self-righteous.
    - (3) When you “*mourn*” over sin, others will feel convicted and not want you around.
    - (4) The “*meek*” person might be run over.
    - (5) When you break out of the spiritual status quo and truly “*hunger and thirst*” for God, some will label you a religious fanatic.
    - (6) Be “*merciful*” and people will call you gullible.
    - (7) Strive to be “*pure in heart*” and you will feel the tension of a world that lives on lust.
    - (8) And strive to be a “*peacemaker*” and you had better get ready for war.
  - b. Our faith begins, develops, and matures as we live out the first seven beatitudes.
    - (1) But then our faith is tested when we come to the last one.
    - (2) What is hard about this beatitude is that we all like to be liked, and this beatitude tells us that when we choose to follow Jesus that will not be the case.

7. This beatitude is the longest one because it is the hardest to embrace.
  - a. It is the only beatitude with a command: *“Rejoice and be glad.”*
  - b. It is the only one with an explanation.
  - c. It is the only one repeated twice.
  - d. It is the only beatitude addressed directly to us. The tense changes from *“blessed are those”* in vs. 10 to *“blessed are you”* in vs. 11.
8. This AM using this beatitude as our basis let us notice four things Christ and the Bible have to say about the world’s opposition to the Christian’s life.

### LESSON:

- I. The first thing we notice from this beatitude is that opposition and persecution are not maybes for the Christian – They are absolute certainties.
  - A. Christ is not giving us instructions on what to do:
    1. *“If”* we are ever insulted or persecuted.
    2. Or, *“Just in case”* you are in a country where they do not like Christians.
    3. Jesus did not say, *“If,”* or *“Just in case this happens to you.”*
    4. He said, *“Blessed are you **WHEN**...”*
      - a. It is not a question of *“If”* we will be persecuted; but *“When.”*
      - b. Jesus said that if we are living the Christian life, we **WILL** be persecuted; and the more we let our light shine the quicker that persecution will come.
  - B. As we look back through the Bible we find that persecution has always been the lot for Godly people:
    1. Abel - Genesis 4:3-8.
    2. Moses - Exodus 5:21; 14:11; 16:2; 17:2.
    3. Samuel - 1 Samuel 8:5.
    4. David - 1 Samuel 18:9-11.
    5. Elijah - 1 Kings 18:17; 19:2.
    6. Jeremiah – Jeremiah 20:10.
    7. Daniel - Daniel 6:12-16.
    8. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego - Daniel 3.
    9. Nehemiah - Nehemiah 4:1-3.
    10. Amos - Amos 7:10-13.
    11. The apostles - Acts 4:1-3; 5:17-18; 12:5.
    12. Stephen - Acts 7.
    13. Paul - 2 Corinthians 11:24-28.
    14. This is not to mention the Lord Himself who was put to death by the people He ministered to.
  - C. Let us notice 2 passages that deal with persecution:
    1. Matt. 10:16-25: (Read).
      - a. Notice here Christ put the emphasis on *“when,”* not *“if.”*
      - b. Notice esp. vs. 25.
        - (1) Here Christ said that if this is what they said about me; and if this is what they did to me; then what will they do to my followers?
        - (2) If they did it to Him, they will certainly do it to His true followers.
        - (3) The only question here is, *“Did they do it to Christ?”*  
-- Let the Scriptures answer:
          - (a) John 8:48: *“The Jews answered and said to Him, “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?”*
          - (b) John 10:20: *“And many of them were saying, “He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?”*
          - (c) Matt. 27:39-44: (Read).
      - c. If this is the way they treated Christ, we cannot expect anything less.

2. 2 Tim. 3:12: “*And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*”
  - a. Paul said, “*In reality*”..... “*Everyone who wants to do God’s will, will be persecuted.*”
  - b. Here there is absolute certainty – no debate.
  - c. Everyone who wants to do God’s will; everyone who has changed their life; will get opposition from the world.
  - d. Paul told us exactly what the odds are of our being persecuted.
  - e. Simply, 100% of those who desire to be Christ’s disciples and follow Him will be persecuted – THERE ARE NO EXCEPTIONS.

D. Thus, the first thing this beatitude teaches us is that persecution is not a maybe – it is a certainty in the Christian’s life.

## II. Second, who is it that Jesus said would be blessed?

- A. The blessings of these verses are not promised to every person who suffers for the sake of religion.
  1. Much of what is being done in the name of religion that has resulted in some type of persecution does not necessarily fall within the scope of these verses.
  2. Peter makes this very clear in 1 Peter 4:15 when he says that it is possible for one to suffer for the wrong reasons.
  3. Simply, these verses do not say:
    - a. “Blessed are those which are persecuted because they’re obnoxious.”
    - b. “Blessed are those who are persecuted because they were arrogant and abusive in their attempts to witness for Christ.”
    - c. “Blessed are those who are persecuted because they have a ‘holier- than-thou’ attitude.”
    - d. The point is that we can bring endless suffering upon ourselves and can create difficulties for ourselves simply because we act foolishly or self-righteously.
  4. What these verses do say is that those who are persecuted for “*righteousness’ sake*” are the ones who will be blessed.
    - a. To be righteous means to be like Christ.
      - (1) To be like Christ is to be different from the world.
        - (a) Notice John 15:18-22: (Read).
        - (b) Jesus was not persecuted because He was good, but because He was different.
          - i) The world thrives on conformity and cannot tolerate differences.
          - ii) And Jesus refused to conform to their standards of religion, so he was persecuted.
        - (c) His righteousness exposed their unrighteousness and it was their feelings of guilt that brought about their persecution.
      - b. The world today persecutes Christians for the same reason they persecuted Christ.
        - (1) It is because we are different, and that difference is a fundamental difference.
        - (2) Christians have a completely different nature than the unbeliever.
        - (3) Christians live and demonstrate a different lifestyle, one of righteousness.
          - (a) Christians do not compromise with the world and its sinful behavior.
          - (b) Christians realize that they owe everything to Christ and that they are not their own but that they were bought with a price, therefore they seek to live their lives for the One who died so that they might live.
          - (c) For this reason they are persecuted (1 Peter 3:1-4).
- B. If you have never received any opposition to your faith in Christ and your striving to live in obedience to Him, then you need to ask, “Why?”
  1. Let’s do some checking:
    - a. Have you received any opposition lately?
    - b. Are there people you know who, because of your Christian life, are so convinced that they do not want to be around you?
    - c. Are there people who would rather not see you coming?

- d. Are there people who have said bad, slanderous, untrue things about you because of your faith in Christ?
  - e. NOTE: If not, then you need to ask, “Why?” – because something abnormal is going on – Your Christian life is out of balance.
2. Notice what Peter describes as normal for the Christian: 1 Pet. 4:12-13: (Read).
- a. Here Peter said that the normal or usual experience of a Christian is to suffer painful trials and opposition.
  - b. In 1 Pet. 4:4 he expressed this same thought again: (Read).
  - c. Thus the normal experience for a Christian is to be opposed by the world; the abnormal is for them not to persecute you.
  - d. ASK YOURSELF: “If I live my life, day by day, week by week, supposedly as a Christian, but no one ever feels threatened by my lifestyle and everyone likes me and everyone thinks I’m a nice guy and no one feels the need to oppose me – what does that say about my life?
    - (1) Is it saying that there is not much difference between me and the world?
    - (2) Is it saying that I am not exposing much of the world’s darkness?
  - e. NOTE: Christ did not tell us to go out seeking opposition, but rather He said that when we are truly the salt of the earth and the light of the world, we will be opposed.
  - f. Thus, it is not surprising when Christians experience persecution.
    - (1) What is surprising is when a Christian can live in such a way that they do not disturb the world.
    - (2) It is disturbing when a Christian can work in a factory for years and no one is shaken up or disturbed by their way of life.
    - (3) It is disturbing when no one feels the need to oppose him and his different way of life.
    - (4) This is disturbing because every time true salt and light come into a substance it produces a change – either opposition or changed lives.
    - (5) ILLUST.: Jesus Christ.
      - (a) People either loved Him, or hated Him.
      - (b) People either called Him, “*Beelzebub*” or “*Lord and Master.*”
      - (c) He left no middle ground with people.
      - (d) His life was such that you could not be just a “good old boy” and feel comfortable around Him.

### III. Third: “Why are Christians persecuted?”

--We have already noticed that part of the reason is that the world first persecuted Christ (Jn. 10:20).

--Notice 3 more reasons:

- A. 1<sup>st</sup>: As we have just noted, the righteous will be persecuted because we are different from the world.
  - 1. When we began our study of the beatitudes, we noticed that they describe a whole new way of living; a way that is totally different from the world.
  - 2. REVIEW: Beatitudes vs. the world:
    - a. Poverty in spirit runs counter to human pride.
    - b. Mourning concerning one’s sins toward God is resisted by the callous, indifferent, self-satisfied world.
    - c. A meek & quiet spirit is regarded as a cowardly weakness.
    - d. Hungering and thirsting for righteousness runs so counter to the cravings of men for their fleshly desires.
    - e. The merciful spirit rebukes the hard-heartedness of the world.
    - f. Purity of heart painfully contrasts with the unclean hearts of worldly men.
    - g. And God’s peacemakers cannot be endured by those who are persistently contentious and quarrelsome.
    - h. Thus, those who possess the attributes of the beatitudes will be persecuted by the world.
  - 3. As surely as darkness opposes light, the people of this world will oppose the life of one bent on doing God’s will.
  - 4. The righteous will always suffer persecution because they are different from the world.

- B. 2<sup>nd</sup>: The righteous will be persecuted because of the exclusive nature of our religion.
1. It has always been a rather unpopular thing for anyone to have religious convictions of any depth.
  2. While we are to be patient and longsuffering with all men (1 Thess 5:14); we are also to be totally intolerant of false doctrine and sinful actions (Gal. 1:8-9).
  3. Christians in the first century refused to mingle freely with the heathen social life and customs.
    - a. They refused to go to the temples of the Roman gods; they refused to go to the coliseum and watch the gladiatorial games; and they refused to have idols in their homes.
    - b. Because of this exclusive position, Christians were subjected to suspicion, hatred, and persecution.
  4. Christians of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are unpopular when we stand up for the truth.
    - a. When we preach and teach the one church, one baptism, one hope, one way, and challenge the false doctrines of the religious world, we will become the objects of suspicion, hatred, and persecution.
    - b. When we publicly stand against the sins of abortion, homosexuality, adultery, greed, lying, gossip, etc. we will be opposed.
    - c. Simply, truth is exclusive and we cannot compromise with error.
    - d. And just as soon as we demonstrate our deep convictions about the truth, we will become the targets of persecution.
- C. 3<sup>rd</sup>: The righteous will suffer persecution when we begin to press the claims of the Gospel on an unbelieving and wicked world.
1. All Christians are under the obligation of Mk. 16:15: “Go into all the world...”
  2. Many in the world will receive this message of the gospel with gratitude; but there will also be many more who will respond with antagonism.
  3. In Jn. 15:18-21 Christ warned: (Read).

IV. The final point we notice from this beatitude is the Christian’s response to persecution: “*Rejoice and be exceedingly glad...*”

- A. As in all of the beatitudes, this spirit is exactly opposite of the world’s.
1. When we are persecuted, we want to:
    - a. Retaliate like an unbeliever.
    - b. Sulk like a child.
    - c. Lick our wounds in self-pity.
    - d. Grin and bear it like a Stoic.
    - e. Or pretend to enjoy it like a Masochist.
  2. But Christ said we are to “rejoice,” and this is something a worldly person cannot understand.
- B. Notice some reasons we are to rejoice:
1. 1<sup>st</sup>: Because we know that whatever the world does to us physically, they cannot take away our citizenship in God’s kingdom.
    - a. They may take our job, property, and even our life; but they cannot take away our inheritance in heaven.
    - b. Christ said: Matt. 5:10: (Read).
  2. 2<sup>nd</sup>: Because our suffering identifies us with God’s faithful servants in the past and with Jesus Himself: Matt. 5:12b: (Read).
    - (1) To be persecuted for “*righteousness’ sake*” is to be persecuted for being like Christ, and Christ-likeness is evidence of a genuine relationship with the Lord.
    - (2) Such was the case with the prophets who have gone before us.
  3. 3<sup>rd</sup>: Because we know what the trials will do for us: Ja. 1:2-4: (Read).
    - a. In 2 Cor. 12:10 we find that Paul did not enjoy persecution, but he knew that the power of God was at its strongest when he was at his weakest.
    - b. Sometimes it takes some persecution and suffering to bring us to the end of our own strength and to cause us to begin relying on the strength of the Lord.

4. 4<sup>th</sup>: Because we know that the people of the world do see a difference in our lives.
  - a. If I live like the world, Satan has no reason to oppose me.
  - b. But when I live for God, he will do everything in his power to stop me.
5. Finally: Because it reminds me that I do not belong here.
  - a. It reminds me that this world is not my home – I'm just a passing through.
  - b. My true home is in heaven and that is what I long for.
  - c. Paul put it this way: Rom. 8:18: *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”*

CONC.:

1. The Beatitudes that Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount with are not easy to live up to.
  - a. Perhaps that is why we have such a problem with them.
    - (1) We want a Christian life that is painless.
    - (2) We want to go along with the world and be gotten along with.
  - b. Let me ask you a few soul-searching questions:
    - (1) What have you done in the last month that has caused anyone to challenge your faith?
    - (2) When have you risked speaking out for Jesus?
    - (3) How have you defended the cause of Christ in the last month?
    - (4) Do you openly identify yourself as a Christ follower?
  - c. The point is that maybe you have not said anything against Jesus, but perhaps it is because you really have not said anything at all.
  - d. If you are not receiving persecution then perhaps the reason is that people do not see the Savior in your life.
  - e. Every Christian who puts Christ first will face flack somehow, somewhere, at some time.
2. With this final beatitude Jesus challenges us to make a choice.
  - a. Have you chosen to live the type of life Christ describes in Matt. 5:3-12?
  - b. If so, examine your life right now and see if there is enough there to challenge the world which is in darkness and sin?
  - c. If not, are you willing to put the attitudes of the Beatitudes into your life today?
3. If you choose to become the type of person Jesus describes in these verses then you will be truly blessed.
4. I want to close by reading Romans 8:35-39 we Paul talks about the blessings we have: *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*