

The Sermon on the Mount

DEVOTIONAL STUDIES FROM THE
MEN'S MORNING FELLOWSHIP

Matthew 5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

If you manifest the previous beatitudes, guess what: You will be
persecuted!

This last beatitude is not so much a character trait as it is a characteristic. Because you display the traits listed in the beatitudes, those who are not saved will react with persecution against you.

Does it seem odd that persecution would be the result of your being a peacemaker? It doesn't if you understand that the issues of your life are essentially spiritual, not material and physical. You are in a spiritual conflict against sinister forces, and against people who are unwitting agents of evil.

I want to drive this home. Being persecuted for righteousness sake is every bit a description of you as all the other beatitudes. It should not seem unusual at all. In fact, persecution should be common.

Persecuted, or persecution, can take a multitude of forms. It can be as seemingly innocent as being overlooked, or gossiped against; all the way to being martyred.

The important phrase is, for righteousness sake. It cancels out your being disagreeable... or divisive... or difficult... or foolish... or sinful... or slothful. I worked with a guy, in a title company, who thought he was being persecuted because our boss told him to quit sharing his

faith. The trouble was, he didn't do his work. He shared about the Lord when he should have been working.

We can cause our own problems; bring suffering upon ourselves which are quite unnecessary. There is a vast difference between being offensive because of our personality and causing an offense because we are acting rightly.

The apostle Peter put it like this:

1 Peter 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters.

In passing we might note that Peter equated being a **busybody** with murder!

Another, more subtle, thing we want to be aware of is that often times people are persecuted for a certain cause – not for Christ. It may be a good cause; a moral cause; a religious cause. The persecution is real. But it is not a beatitude; it does not bring you the blessing; unless it is **for righteousness sake**.

If you are going to claim persecution, then it has to be **for righteousness sake**.

So... What is it to be righteous? In simple terms, it is to be like Jesus.

Jesus said that the world hated Him. If you are like Him, the world will hate you.

John 15:18 "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated you*.

John 15:19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

John 15:20 Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant 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.

Paul wrote,

2 Timothy 3:12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

It is impossible to categorize suffering. But it wouldn't be going too far to say that the apostle Paul suffered more than anyone else for righteousness sake. His one objective was to know Christ and to make Christ known. For that, he earned his great measure of persecution – which, by the way, he considered a blessing!

Righteousness is different than being good; or than doing what is right. The difference is that righteousness is given to you. You are declared righteous by grace through faith in Jesus. You acknowledge your sin, and you receive God's Savior.

Thus, others are condemned by your being like Jesus. Your witness is that they, too, are Hell-doomed sinners in need of saving. By accepting Jesus you are exposing their true spiritual condition.

It is really quite an insult to the average person to tell them that, eternally speaking, they are on a par with Charles Manson! I don't suggest you actually tell them that; but they understand it by your presentation of what it means to be right with God.

A person is either right with God; **or they are wrong!** John MacArthur put it this way: "Righteousness is confrontational, and even when it is not preached in so many words, it confronts wickedness by its very contrast."

Then he gives this biblical example:

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.

The more Christlike you get, the more hated you will be! Look at Jesus. The Pharisees thought they had the corner on being right with God. My favorite picture of a Pharisee is of him tithing his spices!

Jesus, in this sermon and throughout His life on earth, shattered their notions that righteousness could be attained, or maintained, by

outward rites and rituals. It requires a faith-transaction; it depends upon grace, not works.

Persecution of Christians in America is not violent. But the world still finds ways to persecute those who's lives promote and preach righteousness. You each, I'd assume, have a story or stories of persecution. Maybe you're in the middle of it now! If so, O how happy and to be envied are you!

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Three verses in Second Thessalonians is a kind of commentary on Jesus' words:

2 Thessalonians 1:5 *which is* manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer;

2 Thessalonians 1:6 since *it is* a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you,

2 Thessalonians 1:7 and to *give you who are troubled* rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,

The blessings of God's kingdom are threefold: present, millennial, and eternal.

First, we are promised blessings here and now. Even if your life is one of constant persecution; even if you are martyred; you have the indwelling Holy Spirit, and access to all spiritual blessings in heavenly places.

We believe that Jesus will return in His Second Coming and establish a one-thousand year kingdom of heaven on the earth. It is the millennial kingdom – from the Latin for one thousand. We are described as returning with Jesus to help Him rule over the earth. We will all have received our new, glorified bodies – either in the resurrection from the dead, or in the Rapture.

Then, in eternity, we will live forever in the blessedness of the literal presence of Jesus.

The beatitudes begin and end with this promise of the kingdom. We are blessed to be its citizens now, in the future, and forever.