

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Happy Are the Harassed, Part 1

Scripture: Matthew 5:10-12

Code: 2205

I want to read again for you the verses that are the setting for our thoughts, verses 1 through verse 12, Matthew chapter 5. "Seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain, and when He was seated, His disciples came unto Him, and He opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.'" When all of these other realities have found their place in the life of an individual, the result is in verse 9 and then in 10, 11, and 12.

The first result of living in the Beatitudes, the first is a positive thing. In verse 9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God." A person like this, who lives according to these principles and life patterns, is going to be a peacemaker in the world and thus identify himself as a son of God. But how strange it is that in an absolute contrast to that, we have verse 10. "Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets who were before you."

It is fascinating to me that the believer who lives in the Beatitudes will be both a peacemaker and one who creates persecution. You will both make peace and make trouble. There is an almost awesome ambivalence. The believer is a peacemaker and yet the believer is one who stirs up strife. You hear it from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who said that He came as the Prince of Peace to bring peace and then elsewhere said, "I came not to bring peace but a sword." There is this constant ambivalence where the believer is, in the world, a peacemaker who is able to make a man at peace with God by the presentation of the Gospel. But on the other hand, where there are those who will not respond to his peacemaking effort, he is a troublemaker, and invariably brings about persecution.

After studying the Beatitudes and realizing that they are the characteristics of the man or the woman in God's kingdom, it's easy to feel inadequate, isn't it? You see the tremendous power and impact of these truths. And this kind of person seems a little too good to be true. You feel like you're looking at somebody on a stained-glass window or you're looking at a plaster saint or something carved out of wood or stone. Certainly there's nobody who lives this way in the reality of day-to-day life, nobody who could fulfill all of these incredible characteristics. But God doesn't deal with stained-glass window

saints and God doesn't deal with plaster facsimiles. I believe that what Jesus presents here in this tremendous introduction to the Sermon on the Mount is no less than the portrait of the believer, no less than the picture of a genuine Christian. And of course it's ideal because God never lowers His standards because man is sinful. God simply gives that individual Christ so that Christ can work through that individual the meeting of God's standard.

Now, as we've seen, this is the person who is truly happy; this is the person who is really blessed, this is a person who is in a state of well-being. This is a person who knows bliss, the person who lives these principles. And every one of us who is genuinely Christ's and every one of us who is genuinely born again, every one of us who really is a kingdom's son, must have come to Jesus Christ with these attitudes or we never came at all, we must have seen something of these attitudes manifest in our life, and we should certainly see a progress and a growth to see more of them every day we live until finally we pass into the fullness and the richness of kingdom character.

Tonight we want to look at the last one. If you are one who fulfills all of the elements of the Beatitudes, then on those conditions, you enter His kingdom. Maybe you only fulfill them in a very minimal way, but you had to come with a broken spirit, you had to come mourning over sin, you had to come humble before a holy God, you had to come hungering and thirsting for righteousness, you had to come as one seeking mercy and ready to give it, you had to come as one seeking to be purified in your heart, and you had to come as one who desired to make peace with God. And where all of these things were there, however minimally they were there, if they were there in reality, you entered His kingdom, and then God is saying they should bloom within His kingdom and you should progress and grow until they become more than minimal, but rather they become characteristics that are dominant in your life. And where this happens, you'll find that the eighth Beatitude will always happen. Verse 10 says, "Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

When you pass into the richness and the fullness of kingdom character, and when you begin to live the way God wants you to live, when you begin to fulfill the principles that God has ordained, you're going to find there will be a process of pain and suffering involved. You will be a peacemaker, yes, but you'll be a troublemaker, too.

In James, for example— and I'll show you some Scripture to kind of set your thinking in the context of all of the New Testament. In James chapter 1 and verse 2, it says, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing this, that the testing of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing." What he's saying there is there's going to be some suffering. There's are going to be some trials, there's going to be some testings, there's going to be some hardships.

In 1 Peter chapter 5 and verse 10, it says, “The God of all grace, who has called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.” Invariably in the life of the believer who lives out the Beatitude character, there is going to be a reaction in the world.

All of the virtues that we’ve seen in this context, all of them summed up, are intolerable to an evil world. The world can’t really handle somebody who’s poor in spirit because the world lives in a state of pride, in a state of self-promotion and ego-substantiation. The world can’t tolerate somebody who is mourning over sinfulness. The world wants to bypass sin altogether and continue to convince itself that it’s all right. The world can’t tolerate meekness; it honors pride, and the world can’t tolerate somebody who knows he’s nothing and seeks something that can only be given as a gift. The world says that we have the right to everything because we’ve earned it. The world knows little about mercy, the world knows nothing about purity, and the world has never learned how to make peace. And all of these characteristics, when they exist in the believer, as they progressively bloom within his or her life, counter the system flagrantly. Flagrantly. And that’s the way it is going to be if you live out the Beatitudes.

Let’s look at three things, three distinct features to this last Beatitude, three things that stand out in verses 10, 11, and 12. First of all is persecution, secondly is promise, and thirdly is posture, and I’ll explain that as we go.

First of all, persecution. It is obvious in verses 10 and 11. Look at it. “Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” “Blessed are ye” – and this, verse 11, simply personalizes verse 10. Verse 10 says, “Blessed are they,” verse 11 says, “Blessed are ye.” It personalizes it. “When men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.” Now, I really believe that this is one Beatitude. The reason I believe it’s the same one is because the term “persecute” is used in verse 10, and the term “persecute” is used again in verse 11. It’s really the same thing, it’s just expanded in verse 11. Another reason I believe it’s really only one Beatitude is that there’s only one result given. You take verse 10 and 11, and the only result is at the end of verse 10: “For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Now, all of the Beatitudes have a promise with the character, and there’s only one promise in verses 10 and 11, and that’s at the end of verse 10. You say, “Well, if it’s only one promise, then why does it have two ‘blesseds’?” I believe that God double-blesses those who suffer. I believe God double-blesses those who are persecuted. It’s almost as if we need it in this particular case. Double-blessed are those who are persecuted.

Now, let’s look and see who’s involved, first of all. Who is it that is persecuted? Well, it doesn’t really say. It just says in verse 10, “Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,” and in verse 11, “Blessed are ye when men shall revile and persecute you.” But it’s pretty simple to know who they are. The blessed ones of verse 10 and 11 are the same blessed ones of verses 3 through 9.

There's no change in character. It is the people who have lived out the Beatitudes. It is the kingdom people. And the more you live the Beatitudes, the more likely there is to be a reaction in the world. The more you live for Christ, the more likely you are to create a response in the world. And so it is those who fulfill the first seven Beatitudes and to the degree that they fulfill it, they'll experience this, the eighth.

I can show you that in another text, 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 12. Here you have a picture of the future but yet it's certainly pertinent to us. It says in verse 11 that "Persecutions and afflictions which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra, what persecutions I endured, but out of them all the Lord delivered me." Paul says, "I was persecuted as one who lived a kingdom life, as one who manifested Jesus Christ, I was persecuted." In verse 12, he says, "Yes, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." In other words, this is a gilt-edged guarantee that anybody who lives out the Christlike character is going to suffer. And by the way, the Beatitudes are best manifested in the character of Jesus Christ Himself. Even He bore sin for us. As we live out the characteristics of the Beatitudes, we are going to find that we cross-grain the society in which we live, and the greater the manifestation of this kind of character, the more inevitable will be the consequences. In Galatians 4:29, it says simply, "But as then" – no different in our day, it was as then – "he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now." Nothing has changed. He that is born of the flesh will always persecute he that is born of the Spirit.

I always think about the man who took a new job amidst a profligate and evil group of men, and he was very fearful about what they might do to him because he was a Christian. And they were rather vile and obstreperous and evil men, and he came home after his first day, and his wife said to him, "Well, how did you get along?" and he said, "I got along terrific. They never even found out I was a Christian." Well, you will get along terrifically if nobody ever finds out you're a Christian. But as you begin to live the Christ life and as you begin to manifest the Beatitudes, as you share the reproach of Jesus Christ, as you participate in the fellowship of His sufferings, as you live righteously in the world, you will find that the son of the flesh will always persecute the one born of the Spirit. Living in direct opposition to Satan in his world and in his system will inevitably bring antagonism and persecution from the people who don't respond to your message. And I've said it before and I'll say it again: If you don't experience the persecution, they're probably not too sure you're a Christian. Or you say you're a Christian but it doesn't seem to make much difference. You aren't living a confrontive, Christlike life because Christlikeness produces the same reaction it did when Christ was producing it on earth.

There was never anyone more loving than Jesus Christ. There was never a greater peacemaker than Jesus Christ. And for some people, they responded to that love, and for some people, they entered into that peace. But even though Jesus was the most loving, magnanimous, gracious, kind, peaceful person who ever lived, everywhere He went, He created antagonism. Why? Because He confrontive about the issues. And it is so with all the righteous. You chart the course of the righteous throughout history, and they have always suffered for their godliness. Always. It began in the very beginning, in

the book of Genesis, when a godly, righteous man named Abel was murdered by an ungodly, unrighteous brother who simply could not tolerate his righteousness, and it's been so ever since. Moses had to choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than compromise himself in the pleasures of Egyptian society, Hebrews 11 tells us. There was always a price to pay.

Thomas Watson, the Puritan writer, says, "Though they be ever so meek, merciful, pure in heart, their piety will never shield them from suffering. They must hang their harp on the willows and take up the cross. The way to heaven is by the way of thorns and blood. Set it down as a maxim," he says. "If you will follow Christ, you will see the swords and staves. Put the cross in your creed," end quote. In fact, if you want to know the truth of it, one of the most wonderful guarantees that your salvation is real is to be persecuted. And if you don't see that in your life, you have reason to question.

In Philippians chapter 1 and verse 29, it says this: "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." That's just part of it. It is given unto you on the behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him but to suffer for His sake. That's part of it. Now, back up to verse 28 – this is wonderful. He says, "In nothing be terrified by your adversaries, which is to them an evident token of perdition." In other words, when your adversaries come against you, and they hate the gospel and they hate the Christ in you and they resent the character of kingdom living, when they do that, that is a token of their destiny in perdition. In other words, that's a proof that they're going to hell. But to you it is an evident token of what? Verse 28. Salvation. Isn't that interesting? Whereas the persecution proves that they are going to perdition, the persecution proves that you are redeemed. It is living the redeemed life and seeing the antagonism of a godless world that is evidence that your salvation is genuine.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 3 and verse 3, the apostle Paul says that no man should be moved by these afflictions. You shouldn't be worried if you're persecuted. You shouldn't be fearful if you have to take a little bit. Why? "For ye yourselves know that we are appointed to these things." In other words, this is the design of God. We are to be like Christ, set for the rising and the falling of many. We are to be loved and hated. We are to be honored and cursed. And he says in verse 4, "For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation, even as it came to pass and you know." You see, what he's saying is it's part of being a Christian, it was ordained that way. You knew it was to come to pass. It was given to you to suffer in the behalf of Christ. And when they persecute you, it is an evident token of their perdition. It is also an evident token of the genuineness of your salvation, and so I would back up and say if you don't have any persecution in your life, you better examine whether you're a Christian. If you're not cause for flak in the world, if you're not making waves, if you're not generating some kind of a conflict, then maybe something's seriously wrong.

And I don't care where you live. I'm sure all of the Bible writers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, were well aware that we would live in a rather tolerant time, in a rather tolerant country, at least in terms of national or governmental persecution. But whether you're living in the most tolerant country in the

most tolerant time in history, the cross will never cease to be a reality, and where you live a redeemed life to its hilt, where you live out the principles of the kingdom life, there is going to be a reaction. Always, those who are the obedient sons of the kingdom, those who live the righteousness of Christ in this world are going to be obnoxious to Satan. Always, they are. Just because we live in a so-called Christian country, just because we think the attitude of the world has changed, that's the devil's lie. That's the devil's lie. Christians now sort of pride themselves on the fact that they're popular. You can be a Christian now and be in show business. You can be a Christian and be in anything. And we say, "Well, the world has changed, you see." Christians are now popular and Christians are now famous and Christians are now accepted and Christians are now sort of paraded along and made a part of our society without any hassles at all.

But the issue is not that the world has changed, beloved. The issue is we have lowered the standard of righteousness. And we have people claiming to be Christians who don't live enough of a righteous life to give an honest definition of Christianity, or the systems they are engulfed in would spit them right out. That's the issue. The standard hasn't changed, by God's standards, but ours has, and we think the world is just more tolerant, and the fact is we just don't live that kind of life anymore. Oh, we want to be popular, we want to be famous, we want to be acceptable. But if you live the righteous life that God asks you to live and if you live as a true Christian, the world can only resent and hate. Now, I'm not saying that every Christian is going to be burned at the stake, and I'm not saying that persecution is going to go on all the time. But it says in verse 10, it says, "Blessed are they who are persecuted." It doesn't mean that every single one of us is going to know constant persecution all our lives to an intense degree, he is simply saying the world will pick some of us out. And I believe anyway that all of us who live righteously in the world, at some time or another, are going to know the rebuke of the cross.

You say, "Well, it's not like in the days when they burned them at the stake," and I've often thought to myself, "Which is worse, to be burned at the stake or to live your whole life, say, in a business organization where you can never get the promotion you deserve because you know they resent your Christianity? Or where you're always ostracized from people around you, your community or whatever, because you live for Jesus Christ? Or where the people in your neighborhood don't talk to you anymore because when you talk to them, you don't pander to their evil, you confront them with it?" You see, there are lots of ways that the believer endures the reaction of the world. And I'm not saying that every believer is always persecuted all the time to a great, intense degree. But the world is set against the things of God, and as you live them out, you're going to experience something of the reproach of Christ, some more than others, right?

Now, if you want, you can escape. You can go through your whole life and never get persecuted. It's very simple, really. Tell you how to do it. First of all, approve all the world's standards. Approve the world's standards. Fit right in. And then accept the world's morals and the world's ethics. Just join right in. Live like the world lives. Don't tell people they're sinners. Don't tell people they're lost without

Jesus Christ. Don't tell people they're doomed to death, and for goodness' sakes, don't talk about hell. Don't preach and teach that Jesus Christ is the only way and every other system of religion is a lie. Don't separate yourself from the world and all of its activities and all of its enterprises. Go along with the world, laugh at its jokes, enjoy its entertainment, smile when it mocks God, let them take His name in vain, and just be ashamed to take a stand for Christ, and I'll promise you you'll never be persecuted. And then when you're all done doing that, examine yourself to see whether you're in the faith or not because there might be good question whether you really are. Now, you may be a Christian, just living in disobedience.

And may I add this? If you decide to live this way, remember Luke 9:26, where Jesus said this: "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words, of him shall the Son of Man"— what?— "be ashamed." Jesus said, "If you're ashamed of me, I'll be ashamed of you." The last thing I want and I think the last thing you dear people want is that Jesus Christ would be ashamed of you. But it can happen. It can happen. In Luke 6:26, our Lord said this: "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you." Don't ever forget that. When you are popular with everybody, then they don't know the truth about you. You've masked your Christianity or you're not a Christian at all.

So here we are, people. If we're going to live out the Beatitude life, we've got to get ready for a reaction, that's the way it's going to be. That's the way it's always been, that's the way it'll always continue to be. There's no way to escape that. You can't live a righteous life in the face of an unrighteous society and ever, ever get by without reaction. Do you know something? When our dear Lord Jesus gave these Beatitudes, when He gave these early in His ministry, they already hated Him. Before this time that He even gave the Beatitudes, it says in Mark 3 that the Pharisees or right around this time, actually the Pharisees went forth and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him." They were already thinking of destroying Jesus Christ before He ever really got very far into His ministry.

It's always been interesting to me that in Luke chapter 6 verse 20, you have the Beatitudes. In Luke 6:20, the parallel. But in Luke 6:7, this is verses before, "The scribes and the Pharisees watched him, that they might find an accusation against him." Verse 11: "And they were filled with fury and discussed one with another what they might do to Jesus." It didn't take very long, you see? He'd hardly articulated the principles of His kingdom and the hatred was beginning to rise. And Jesus was saying to the Pharisees and the people listening in that crowd that day on the shore of the Galilean sea and he was saying to the disciples and everybody who was in His hearing, "Look, I'm telling you"— front, right at the beginning, "there's a price to pay to live in my kingdom. It isn't all going to be thrones and glory and crowns and fame and prestige and acceptance and everybody loving you and exalting you and lifting you up. If you're coming into my kingdom, you will suffer, let it be known to you. Let it be known." You see, it's that kind of honesty that separates the wheat from the chaff right at the very start, you see. Nobody comes in with any illusions.

Beloved, we need more preaching like this; we need to say to people more often that if you're going to become a Christian, then God is calling you to live a life contrary to the system of the world and there will be a price to pay. You know, for those people who heard Him that day on the shore of Galilee, following Him could affect their work, first of all. Think of how it would be to be a stonemason. And if you were a stonemason in those days, maybe, perhaps you had a contract to build some kind of a pagan temple. And as the later gentile Christians were studying the things that Jesus had said, they would say to themselves, "Well, my, I'm a stonemason and I'm working on building a pagan temple. What am I going to do now? How am I going to get out of this? I'll lose my job if I stop building this Pagan temple, if I start to live these principles out. I won't have any way of making a living."

Or what if you were a tailor and you were to make the robes for the priests of the false gods? And all of a sudden, you became a believer and you wanted to live out the kingdom principles and you said to somebody, "If I'm going to live the way God wants me to live, then I can't be a tailor anymore," and so it might affect you in your work. And what if you worked for somebody that was ungodly and dishonest and ruthless and vile and you became a believer and you had a new principle for living and you didn't want to work for that person anymore, and you had to step out of the only trade and the only job you knew? You see? You get the point? That's true even today. There are people who have jobs today, and if they're going to live kingdom life like kingdom citizens, maybe it's going to affect what they do. Maybe it's going to affect how they make their money. Maybe it's going to affect how they get their living. Maybe they're going to have to believe God to supply the thing that they don't know the source for if they turn their back on what they've known in the past. And so it could affect their secular job and it still can today.

More than a hundred years after this, a man came to Tertullian and he said to Tertullian, "I've come to Christ, but I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do about my job. I have a job that I don't think is right but I don't know what to do about it." And then he said, "What can I do? I must live." To which Tertullian replied, "Must you?" You see, the only choice is loyalty to Jesus Christ, even if it means you die. Loyalty to Christ is the only choice. And loyalty to Christ would not only disrupt their work life, but you can imagine what loyalty to Christ would do to their social life. Well, you know what it does to your social life. You're going along, doing what all your friends do and living the way all your friends live and being entertained the way all your friends are entertained and doing the whole gig like everybody else, you come to Jesus Christ, and all of a sudden you have a decision to make. "Do I still go out with the boys and do what I did? Do I still go out with those people and take the trips and do the things and engage in the activities? What do I do? My whole social life is disrupted."

And in the ancient world, feasts were held in the temples of different gods. These were the great social events. That's where the music was and that's where the dancing was and that's where the entertainment was. And that's where sacrifices were made, and very often they ate the meat that was offered in the sacrifice. In fact, it got so ridiculous that people who would bring sacrifices to the gods

didn't want to waste any meat, they just waved the sacrifice over the fire and singed the hair on the outer part of it. And then they'd whack off some for the priests and keep the rest and hold a wild party for their friends, and when they became Christians, they wondered, "Well, what do I do with my friends? Do I go and eat the meat offered to the idols? Do I go to the pagan temple for the entertainment and so forth and so on? This can affect my whole social life," and for a Jew, he could be unsynagogued, thrown out of the synagogue, kicked out of his family, the loss of everything he knew.

Let me tell you something: If you are going to live a kingdom life, you ought to be prepared to be lonely in some crowds, very lonely. And that's why we need each other so much, isn't it? Christianity could disrupt your home life. When one member of a family received Jesus Christ, it was chaos in the home. All kinds of problems. Often they had to choose between Jesus Christ and somebody they loved very dearly. And in those days, too, Christians had to pay a penalty. There were some Christians who were flung to the lions. There were others who were burned at the stake. In fact, Nero used to light his garden parties with flaming Christians. He would cover them with pitch and light them, and then he used to sew Christians into skins of wild animals and set his hunting dogs to tear them to pieces. They were tortured on the rack, they were scraped, they had molten lead was poured hissing on them, red-hot brass plates were affixed to the tenderest parts of their bodies, eyes were torn out, parts of their bodies were cut off and roasted before their eyes, their hands and feet were burned while cold water was poured over them to lengthen the agony, and so forth.

You know, the Romans even trumped up charges that the Christians were guilty of all kinds of things. They said, "They're cannibals," and they got that from the words of Jesus to "eat my flesh and drink my blood" and they accused the Christians of cannibalism in their communion service. They actually said they ate each other. They accused them of immorality. They said their love feasts were orgies of lust. And they even accused them of the kiss of peace being some illicit thing. They slandered them for setting fires. They blamed them for the burning of Rome. They branded them as revolutionaries, and the reason they did that was because the Christian was always talking about God going to destroy the earth finally in fire. They were repeating the message of Peter, and so when the fire started, it was easy to blame the Christians. They blamed them for destroying families. They blamed them for being political rebels.

The Roman Empire was a vast empire. Do you know that in the time after Christ, the Roman Empire went all the way from Britain, from the British Isles clear to the Euphrates, all the way from the north tip of Germany to North Africa. It was a massive empire, the whole known world. And the Romans were tremendously concerned about how to unify that part of the world, how to unify the empire. And they realized that there was one man who personified the empire, there was one man who was the personification of the whole Roman Empire, and that was the emperor, Caesar. So "Caesar," they said, "is the cohesive element. We need to make Caesar into a god, and if we get everybody to worship Caesar and we ascribe to him divine honor and we build temples all over the empire to his

divinity, then we'll have our cohesive unit." It started very slowly, but after a few years, there was developed a real emperor-worshipping cult. It became the one thing to unify the Roman Empire. And by the way, it was compulsory once each year, every person in the Roman Empire had to go and burn a pinch of incense to Caesar and say this: "Caesar is lord."

Now, the Christians had trouble with that because they would say only Jesus is Lord, and the Christians refused to do it. Now, when a man burned his incense, he was given a certificate called a *libellus*. And once he had the certificate called the *libellus*, then he could go and worship any god he wanted to worship. They just wanted everybody to plug in, at one point, to Caesar. The Christians wouldn't do it. They never got their *libellus*; therefore, they were constantly worshipping illegally. They chose Christ, they refused to compromise, they became dissidents, rebels, pockets of disloyalty, threats to the empire's solidarity, and one poet spoke of them as "the panting, huddling flock whose only crime was Christ." So they faced torture for their stand. They faced alienation for their stand. And you know something, people? I think that maybe the reason our Christianity is so tolerable in our society today is because our standard is so low.

So Jesus adds to the list of Beatitudes the inevitability of persecution. Who? Anybody who lives the Beatitudes out. How? How are we to be persecuted? Let's look at it. How? Verse 11. "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake." There you have the three ways: persecuted, reviled, and all manner of evil said against you falsely. First of all, persecuted. He says you're going to be persecuted. It comes from *dik* in the Greek. It's an interesting word. It means to pursue or to drive or to chase away. It's the idea of running after. Finally it came to mean to persecute or to harass or to treat evilly. And he's simply saying – that's what He's saying. "Blessed are the harassed; happy are the harassed. Blessed are those that are persecuted for righteousness' sake."

Now, listen. I want to show you something fascinating here. Since all of the other Beatitudes previous to this one are inner attitudes, they're all inside attitudes – the Jews had an external religion, and Christ was giving them an internal one. They're all attitudes. This is also an attitude. This is an attitude. It is an attitude of a willingness to be persecuted. That's what He's saying. It is that lack of fear, that lack of shame, that presence of 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. And if persecution results, let it be." It's that attitude. It is a passive participle in the Greek and it indicates a permissiveness. Those who allow themselves to be persecuted. Blessed are they who allow themselves to be persecuted. Blessed are they whose attitude is, "I will never flee it. I will face it, if facing it I must, to live the principles of Christ." And since it is a passive perfect participle, the perfect tense meaning it happens and continues, it gives the idea of a constant attitude where the believer is constantly willing to accept whatever comes as a result of living a Beatitude kind of life. You might translate it this way: "They have been and continue to be willing to be persecuted. They are the blessed."

I guess this is where some of us bail out, isn't it? We're not willing. We're not willing. I struggle with that myself. I'm not willing to take what I'm going to get if I say what I ought to say. You have that problem? I'm not willing to be bold and just confront the situation sometimes and say what needs to be said. I'm not willing to live the Christ life in the midst of a Christless situation and so be light and salt in the world, and let whatever comes come my way. I tend to want to accommodate myself and have the world like me. Inevitably, I justify myself by saying, "If I'm popular with them and they like me a lot, I can sneak gospel in." Well, let me tell you something: God never needed sneaky preachers. He doesn't need sneaky prophets and he doesn't need sneak witnesses and evangelists; He needs those who are willing to confront.

And so first of all, they were going to be chased and pursued and harassed. They were going to be willing to do that. So there's the idea of pursuing and chasing and, of course, the end result was imprisonment. The end result was death for some. For others, there was just a kind of a chasing away. In other words, if you really live a Christlike life in this society, you can't commingle with it, can you? You can't go to the parties with the boys, you can't do what all the gals in the neighborhood do, you can't take off with the couples you used to take off with and do the things they do. You just can't do it anymore. There's something about living the life that Christ wants you to live that causes them to chase you out of the group. You just don't fit anymore. That's the way it ought to be.

There's a second element. He says in verse 11 they'll revile you. *Oneidiz*. It literally means to cast in one's teeth. To cast in one's teeth. It's used in the crucifixion of Christ in Matthew 27:44. They cast in His teeth. They mocked Him. They made fun of Him. They reviled Him. They scorned Him. It's to throw something in your face, is what it is. It's to abuse somebody with vile, vicious, mocking words. That's essentially what it means. So we not only are going to be chased out of the groups we used to be in, we'll be ostracized from the activities that we used to be a part of. Not only that, there are going to be people who are going to speak evil of us, they're going to say things about us, they're going to use unkind words when our name comes up. They did it with Jesus. They said, "Ah, he hangs around with prostitutes and winebibbers," and so forth. So if you're going to live the Beatitude life, you've got to be willing to be persecuted and reviled, and there are going to be some people who are going to say unkind things about you. Some people maybe you may care about, too.

There's a third thing, and this is really a hard one to take. You know, I've always found that I could take the chasing me away. Nobody wants me around much after they find I'm a minister. It's amazing how fast people want to get out of my presence. After they find out I'm not like a minister like other ministers they've known, that I'm a little more confrontive. And so they'll find that out as I begin to maybe confront them a little with the things of Christ, and then they're really itchy to get out of there. I'm rarely invited to the activities that they engage in. I can handle that and I can even handle people saying unkind and vile and vicious things about me and I get some of that. I get some stuff that's – I just got a letter from a man in Boston who listened to our radio program who called me a dirty, fascist

pig. I don't know how many people he's told that I was a dirty, fascist pig, and I'm sorry he feels that way and I don't know why he feels that way, but that's just part of it, see?

And I know what it is to be arrested from preaching. I preached a sermon in a certain place in the South and I didn't go very far from there until a police car caught up with me and arrested me and threw me in jail and threatened to strip my clothes off and beat me with a whip and so forth and so on if I continued to do what I was doing. That's in the United States of America. I guess those things, can tolerate, but then there's that third thing where he says here that they'll "say all manner of evil against you falsely." And you know, sometimes that's so hard to take. I don't mind if they don't like what I do say, but when they make me say things that I don't say, that's hard to take. And then you got to try to defend yourself for something you never even said.

"They say slanderous and evil things against you." They tried to say about Jesus that he was the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier. That wasn't true. They've tried to say things about God's people throughout all of history. Arthur Pink well says that "it is a strong proof of human depravity that men's curses and Christ's blessings should meet on the same person." Isn't that interesting? What a picture of depravity. Christ's blessings and men's curses meet on the same person. It's the people He blesses that the world curses. That shows you how far they are from God. Such a life provokes the ungodliness of men to be resentful. It is the enmity of the serpent against the holy seed.

I'll tell you something, I love our Lord's honesty – I love it. His first sermon, He starts out, "Happy, happy" – you say, "Boy, the first time in, you just want to kind of smooth the waters. Just let them know how neat it is to be a Christian. Tell them how wonderful" – and I'm telling you, the first thing He ever said set standards so high, they must have fallen flat over on their backs. And then when He gets all done, He says, "And by the way, if you want to live this way, you will be persecuted and chased out of your jobs, your homes, your society. You will find yourself reviled; that is, people will speak vilely and viciously against you, and you will find inevitably that they will say things about you that are not true, they are lies. They are lies. So get ready for that. That's right. It's going to happen. It's inevitable." Why does it happen? Why does it have to be this way? Why is it that if we live God's way in this world, why does it have to be this way? Well, that's the why. Why? Look at verse 10. "Blessed are they who are persecuted for" – what? – "righteousness' sake." Look at the end of verse 11, the end of the verse. "For My sake."

You know why they persecute you? I'm going to tell you something shocking. They really don't hate you. That's comforting, isn't it? They really don't hate you. Who do they hate? Christ. And it really isn't you that they resent, it's the life you live, you see. And our Lord Jesus, in John 15 and John 16, said to His disciples, "Look, if they killed me, they'll kill you, and if they hate me, they'll hate you, and if they persecuted me, they'll persecute you as long as they know that you belong to me." Jesus revealed holiness in action to an unholy world. Do you want to know something? The world went along a long time and never saw a perfect man. That's right. Never saw a perfect man. And the

longer they went and never saw a perfect man, the more smug they became in their contented sinfulness. There was never a perfect man.

When Jesus came into the world, the world saw a perfect man. And all of a sudden, it blew apart all their self-confidence. It destroyed the basis on which they had stood. And in the face of a perfect man, they felt rebuked, and so they killed that perfect man. Because if you can't meet the standard, they said, wipe it out so it isn't around. That's the way it'll always be. And as you and I allow Christ to live through us, we will set a standard that they can't attain, and because they can't attain that standard, they will desire to remove the standard so they can remain in the contentedness of their delusion. It's for righteousness' sake.

And you know, it happened to the disciples like Jesus said it would. Andrew persisted in preaching and was ordered to be crucified. According to tradition, he was fastened with cords to a cross that death might be slow, and he remained in that condition until he died. According to tradition, Peter, after nine months in prison, was crucified head-down. Paul was beheaded by Nero. James, Matthew, Matthias, Bartholomew, and Thomas suffered martyrdom and perhaps every disciple but John, who died in lonely exile in the isle of Patmos. It happened the way He said it would happen. There's always a price to pay when to live a kingdom life. But beloved, listen. The fruit of it is forever. The fruit of it is forever. For when you give up in this life, you inherit, verse 10 says, the kingdom of heaven. When they take away everything you possess in this world, they'll never be able to touch everything He'll give you in the next, you see? Well, this is the Beatitude that sums it up, and we didn't even get started, so we'll continue it next time.

Father, thank You for our fellowship tonight. Thank You for ministering to us in the Spirit of God through the Word of God. Lord, teach us to so live our lives in conformity to Your principles and Your truths, that we just confront the world. Oh, God, protect us, preserve us, from lowering the standard. Let us be bold. Let us be firm. Let us be walking in the Spirit so that Christ is manifest in us, and whether we live, we live unto Christ, and whether we die, we die unto Christ. So whether we live or die, we are His. Oh, Father, may we be those whose lives rebuke. May we be such a standard that those around us are so discomforted that either they seek peace with God and let us be peacemakers or they react negatively. But God, may we not be content to be neutral. May we not be content to do nothing. May we not be that despicable lukewarm that caused our Lord to spew us out of His mouth.

While your heads are bowed, I just want you to be meditating in prayer, and I want to remind you of something. I'll never forget a few years ago when a young man in our church was sharing Christ in a park, and some men jumped on him and beat him up. That didn't stop him. He recovered from that in a couple of weeks, and he was down on the corner of 7th and Broadway in Los Angeles, telling people about Jesus Christ, and some men attacked him again, and this time they had sticks and they fractured his skull in four places. They took this young man to the hospital, they drilled three holes in

his skull to try to relieve the pressure, and in three days, he awoke in the presence of Jesus Christ. You don't think about that in our day, do you? I thank God for the courage and the boldness of such a one.

What about you? Do you know what it is to live such a godly life that you become a rebuke to people around you? Not because you're obnoxious, not because you're proud, not because you're demanding, not because you're authoritarian, not because you talk too much, but because there's too much of Christ manifest in you. There's too much of that perfection that the world can't tolerate. Are you willing to pay the price? Are you willing to live the way God wants you to live, to live out the kingdom life, to be a living illustration of the Beatitudes whatever the price and to bear the reproach of Jesus Christ? Are you willing to take your cross like He took it? Are you willing to suffer the loss of all things that you may gain the kingdom? Are you willing to pay any price? That's what Jesus is asking for, and those are the only kind of people who change the world for His glory.

I'm going to ask you, just in the silence of this moment, to talk to the Lord in your own heart. And maybe some of you need to say, "Lord Jesus, I don't even know what it is to live the kind of a life that is a rebuke to the world. I'm so caught up in the world, they wouldn't even know the difference. They wouldn't even know if I was a Christian." There's a good possibility that you're not a Christian, that you just think you are, and you've never really given your life to Christ. Maybe this is the time for that. On the other hand, you say, "Well, John, I know I'm a Christian, and I love the Lord Jesus Christ, and this is the way I want to live. I'm like Paul in Romans 7, I want it so much, but I just fail all the time." That's not necessary, either.

God has given you the resource in His Holy Spirit if you'll yield to His Spirit one moment at a time, to so live this kind of life that you can live it to the glory of God. This is the way to live. If you never had anything in the world, you'd have the blessing of God, and if you have His blessing, you have everything there is. And that's why Peter said this: "If you be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are you." Happy are you. You want to really be happy in your heart? Pay the price of living the Beatitudes in your life.

Father, while each of us is searching our own hearts, because this is a strong Word, while each of us is examining our own lives to see if we are the ones who are willing to pay the price, if we are truly the ones who have inherited the kingdom, then we are the ones who are willing to be persecuted continuously. We are the ones who are willing to be reviled, who are willing to have all manner of evil said against us falsely. If that's what it means to live for you, then we choose loyalty to you, no matter what the price. And Father, we're the ones who can rejoice and be glad because this is the way it was supposed to be. This is the way it's always been, from the beginning, and so we identify with all Your people who have lived the righteous life.

God, I pray for those who've never given their life to Christ, that this might be the time they really make that commitment. For Christians who don't know what it is to come out and be separate from the world, to pay the price, to live the life that you've asked us to live, may this be the time they do that. And God, help us not to lower the standard, help us not to be conformed to the world, but to transform the world by being conformed to You.

Father, thank You for our time tonight, for the fellowship of the saints that we love and enjoy. Father, how precious it is to us. We don't know what to do when we're with other people. We just aren't a part, we're just ostracized, we're rejected, we don't fit in. And oh, God, to think that You have provided for us this rich, wonderful fellowship, this cherished love of the brethren, this so deeply needed communion, we're so grateful for every precious soul here, for every wonderful life, for the potential that we have to love each other and care for each other and minister to each other, how thankful we are. Help us never to take it for granted. Help us never to become petty. Help us never to become critical of each other but to cherish every precious person within this communion.

And Father, for those who don't yet know what it is to be a part, we pray that You'll call them out of the world unto Yourself, for Your glory in Jesus' name, Amen.

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