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

The Only Way to Happiness: Endure Persecution, Part 1
Scripture: Matthew 5:10-12
Code: 90-198

The Only Way to Happiness: Endure Hardship, Part 1

Well tonight we, after a number of weeks of absence, come back to endeavor to finish our study of the Beatitudes, the wondrous teachings of Jesus we find in Matthew chapter 5. Turn back in your Bible to Matthew chapter 5, if you will. I'm kind of flip-flopping between the New King James version and back to the NAS, a more familiar ground for us. Tonight Matthew chapter 5, the Beatitudes...Jesus promised happiness, He promised blessing. And that blessing comes by means of the things that are taught here.

In verse 2, "He opened His mouth and began to teach them saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men cast insults at you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of Me. Rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Those simple, straight-forward, direct, clear, unmistakable words so simply read contain, as we know now, an absolute veritable unfathomable mind of truth. It's hard to even plumb the depths of this divine wisdom. We've endeavored to do so by taking each beatitude and exploring its richness.

We come now to the last in verses 10 to 12, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And then verses 11 and 12 give further explanation of that beatitude.

After studying the Beatitudes, these promises of blessing, promises of true and deep and lasting happiness, after studying them and realizing that they are the characteristic qualities of the man or woman in God's kingdom, it's easy to feel a little inadequate. This kind of person who is poor in spirit, mourning over sin, meek, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker and persecuted seems almost too good to be normal...like we're looking at someone in a stained glass window, or some kind of a stone statue, or plaster saint rather than somebody involved

in the reality of day-to-day living.

But God doesn't deal with plaster saints and He doesn't deal with unrealities. Jesus here is presenting the portrait of a believer and to one extent or another this characterizes all of us. There are times in our lives when it's maybe hard to see ourselves here, but in fact we are. We are the poor in spirit, that is we are the ones who know we are spiritually bankrupt. And if we are to enter into the kingdom of God we bring nothing except our need and cry out to God in our poverty for a salvation that only He can give. We are those who mourn, mourning over our plight, mourning over our sin, mourning over judgment, recognizing what awaits us, mourning over the separation from God that characterizes us. And we are therefore the meek, we come not proud and self confident but humble and broken, seeking salvation from a merciful God. We are those who recognize we don't have righteousness but we hunger and thirst for it. We are those who having received mercy can show it to others. We are those whose hearts have been cleansed and made pure. We are those who rather than being at war with God and everybody else have become peacemakers because we've made our peace with Him. And consequently we are those who will to one extent or another suffer persecution from a God-hating, Christ-rejecting, Satan-controlled society.

This is not some far off identity to be attained by a select few. This is simply a genuine description of those who are God's children. Everyone of us who is genuinely Christ's came with these attitudes, came through this process so that we have been transformed into beatitude-type people. We don't always manifest the same poverty of spirit, or sorrow over our sin, or meekness, or mercy, or purity. We don't always manifest that hunger and thirst for righteousness as we should. We're not always the peacemaker we ought to be. But that is the character of our life. Those are the things that mark us out as God's children.

And ultimately because we are transformed, because we are this kind of person we are at odds with the world around us and that leads to suffering, that leads to pain, problems. First the poverty of spirit which ends rebellion and produces submission to the King, that poverty of spirit which realizes personal bankruptcy and bows down before the King to plead for Him to be gracious. That mourning that causes us to look at our sin, that meekness that therefore follows as we rightly assess ourselves, that passion that flames into a hunger and thirst for righteousness, then that service that is merciful toward others, that purity of heart that enables us to truly understand and know our God, that peace that fills our hearts and makes us peacemakers. All of that granted to us by God in the matter of salvation in one proportion or another produces a character which not only is content and blessed and happy, but is contradictory to everything around it. And the realization of such a character, of such a pattern of life, such a disposition in the midst of the conditions of worldly life no doubt stirs up, to one degree or another, opposition.

So, we're not surprised to come to this beatitude. Peacemakers will be persecuted. That's what happens to peacemakers. We come to preach the gospel of peace. We come to live out that gospel

of peace and we are persecuted for it to one extent or another.

Now as we look at this beatitude in verse 10 and its explanation in verses 11 and 12, I want to just point out three distinct features...we'll call it persecution, promise and posture....persecution, promise and posture.

First of all, let's talk about persecution. Verse 10 is very simple. Happiness belongs to those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And verse 11 simply personalizes it. Blessed are YOU when men cast insults at you. Were not talking about somebody else, talking about you. And when they persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of Me. This is really one beatitude, as I said, in verse 10, personalized in verse 11, and further explained in verse 12. It is one beatitude because it has only one result. The one result at the end of verse 10, "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven." There's no second result given in verse 11 because verse 11 is just a personalization of the blessedness of verse 10 that comes to those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness. There's a double blessing here, but only one result...theirs is the kingdom of heaven. It is to say that those who are persecuted for Christ, those who are insulted for Christ, those against whom all kinds of evil is spoken falsely on account of Christ therefore give evidence that they belong to the kingdom of heaven. Those who are kingdom citizens are at odds with Satan's system. This then promises persecution to one degree or another to those who belong to the Lord.

Now let's just ask the simple and obvious questions...who, what, why and when. Let's start with who. Who's involved here in this beatitude? Well let's go back to verse 10. "Blessed are those who have been persecuted." Now who are they? Well, it refers immediately to all those being described in verses 3 through 9. Blessed are those poor in spirit, mourners, meek, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers. In other words, the believers, those who are God's, those who belong to Him. All who will live godly in this present age will suffer persecution, Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:12, it just goes with the territory. So blessed are all of you beatitude people who have as a result of your transformed lives lived in the midst of an ungodly world experienced to one degree or another persecution.

We, to some extent, share the reproach of Christ. We are persecuted, as it were, for His sake. We share, Paul said, the fellowship of His sufferings if we live godly in this world. I mean, you can't expect to live in direct opposition to Satan and his worldly system without antagonizing him and that system.

Now if you're not experiencing persecution, if you're not experiencing to some degree hostility, or rejection, animosity, false accusation, insults it is possible that you're not a Christian...or it is also possible that you're a disobedient Christian, somehow hiding the reality not only of your own Christianity but of the truth of God which you are not to compromise in the way you live and the things

you speak.

I really think that if you're like Christ and if you boldly live as He lived and if you speak the truth of God, you will produce the same reaction to some degree that was produced when Christ was here on earth. Oh, they may not crucify you, but there will be hostility and animosity. Even going in to the book of Revelation in the end times, you read Revelation 6:9 to 11, Revelation 13:4 to 8 and you find in the end times tremendous hostility against those who were true to the gospel and who exalted Christ and proclaimed the truth. The righteous have always suffered. They will always suffer. They will suffer on in to the future for their virtue, for their godliness in one way or another.

I mean, you can go all the way back from Revelation to Genesis and it all began with Abel. Abel was righteous. Abel did what God told him to do and Abel was killed by Cain. By the way, Cain was a religious man who also brought an offering to God, an unacceptable one, but he hated the true worshiper, his own brother, and murdered him.

Moses, you remember, in Egypt chose to suffer affliction with the people of God, Hebrews 11:25 says, rather than to compromise with Egypt. And that's the way it's always been.

Thomas Watson, the Puritan, says, "Though they be ever so meek, merciful, pure in heart, their piety will not shield them from suffering. They must hang their harp on the willows and take up the cross," he writes. "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. Put the cross...he wrote...in your creed."

In many ways persecution is a token of true discipleship. Philippians 1:29, "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." It's to be expected that there will be some measure of suffering if you're faithful to Christ.

First Thessalonians chapter 3 verse 3, "So that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions, for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this." Paul says indeed we...when we were with you kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction, and so it came to pass you know. It is to be expected.

All the New Testament apostles and the New Testament writers would agree that even in the most tolerant environment, even in the most tolerant country, in the most tolerant time, the cross would never cease to be a symbol of derision, a symbol that brought out hostility and in some cases hatred and false accusation and even persecution.

In fact, the apostles probably would have urged that the absence of persecution was cause for alarm. Enough to drive the believer to his knees to do his spiritual inventory. Always those who are obedient

to the Lord of the kingdom, those obedient children of the kingdom who live the righteousness of Christ and who live out His Word in obedience will prove to be, to one degree or another, noxious to the satanic system around them and produce some forms of hostility.

No matter how acceptable some forms of Christianity might be, no matter how acceptable a sort of benign compromising Christianity might be, true, godly, righteous Christianity lived out and spoken freely and openly will produce hostility. Now we've tried to strip that out of our Christianity at this age. We've tried to make the gospel inoffensive. We've tried to understand what people who are unconverted like and don't like and remove the part they don't like out and make the gospel tolerable to them. We've stripped it of its impact. We've...we've taken the law out, we've taken the bite out, we've taken the confrontation out to make it as palatable as possible and in most cases we've stripped the truth to the point where it is no longer the saving truth.

I mean, if you want to escape persecution, you can do it. Just approve what the world does. Instead of disapproving it, just affirm it or ignore it. Accept the world's morals, the world's ethics, live as they live. Don't tell people they are sinners. Don't confront them with the fact that they are lost and without Christ, doomed to eternal judgment at the hands of Almighty God. Don't talk about hell. Don't preach and teach that Jesus Christ is the only way and only by faith in Him and not through some religious exercise, some ceremony, some self-righteousness can salvation be gained, but only by faith in Him. Don't separate yourself from the world system around you, go along with it, laugh at its jokes, enjoy its entertainment, smile when it mocks God, let them take His name in vain. Be ashamed to take a stand for Christ and you will escape some persecution.

But I warn you, that's a very dangerous perspective. Luke 9:26 Jesus said, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and My words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed." If you're ashamed not only of Christ but of the words which Christ taught, that is to say the truth of God given to us on the pages of holy Scripture, if you're ashamed of that it may well be that you are one of whom the Lord Himself will be ashamed. That is to say you may not be a believer at all. The Lord may not even claim you. You're either not saved or you are certainly a far-gone disobedient child.

On the other hand, look for a moment at 1 Peter 1 verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ form the dead to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven in you." That's just one of the great statements in all of Scripture, talks about what is ours in salvation...great mercy, born again, living hope, an inheritance imperishable, undefiled, will not fade away, reserved in heaven for us. "Who...verse 5...are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." So we have salvation. We're protected in order that we might enter in to that full salvation that is set in heaven for us. "In this you greatly rejoice," verse 6, "even though now for a little while if necessary you have been distressed by various trials."

Why? Verse 7, "In order that your faith may be proven 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." The trials that come into our lives, including persecution, and trouble, and difficulty, are part of God's testing to prove the validity of our faith. If you live out your life and the fire comes, the fire will prove either you're genuine or you're not. If you're nothing but weedy ground in which the seed of the truth went down a little ways but the weeds choked it out, or if you're that stony ground where the plant went down a little ways and hit the rock bed and you died and perished without any fruit, that will show up under confrontation, persecution. That's what Jesus was saying. And you will wither and die. Our faith is tested and proven in trials.

There were apparently people, lots of people, in Peter's time, as there are now, willing to be identified with Christ as long as it didn't cost them anything. That was true in Jesus' day and He would have none of it and neither will Peter. What Peter was saying is what Jesus was saying, your faith will be tested. It will be tested.

Following Christ is not going to be easy in this world. Following Christ could effect your work. I mean, suppose a man in biblical times was a stone mason and his business was to fulfill a contract to build a pagan temple. Suppose he was a tailor and was asked to make robes for the priests of false gods. Suppose he worked for someone who was dishonest. You get the point, same today. There can hardly be any secular job in which some conflicts like these do not arise between business interest and loyalty to Jesus Christ.

More than a hundred years later after the New Testament times, a man came to Tertullian, the early church father, and he had this very great dilemma about this because he wanted to live out his Christianity, he thought it almost impossible. And so he ended his pleadings for a solution to Tertullian by saying, "What can I do, I must live." And the wise Tertullian replied, "Must you?" What a strange answer. What he was saying is if you die of starvation it's better than if you compromise. The only choice is loyalty to Christ, even if it means you die let alone be deprived of some material thing.

Their loyalty to Christ could be very difficult in the work place. It could be very difficult and disruptive in their social life as it can today. In the ancient world if somebody was really sold out to the Lord, sold out to Jesus Christ, they would be in very great difficulty trying to sort through the social life that they were a part of up until their conversion. I mean, we all would understand that in the Jewish context, immediately they would be thrown out of the synagogue, unsynagogued which was tantamount to excommunication. They would be thrown out of their own families.

But even in a Gentile world there was a severe consequence socially for coming to faith in Christ. In the ancient world most of the...most of the festivals, most of the celebrations were held in the temple

of some false god. Those were the public meeting places. Those were where the parties and the celebrations and the festivals went on. And in very few sacrifices to the false gods was all of the animal or animals burned. In fact, it was common in false religions to just singe the forehead of the sacrificial animal so that you could save all the rest to eat...a sort of symbolic singed sacrifice. Part of the meat went to the priests who ran the religion, and parts to the worshipers. And they would make a feast for their friends. So when you went to offer something to your deity you singed it a little bit, gave some of the meat to the priests and then had a huge party for everybody.

Could a Christian go to such a party? I mean, that was a big question. Even an ordinary meal began with a cup of wine poured out in honor of the gods. Where did a Christian stand in that? You have to be prepared to be lonely in the crowd when you followed Christ. And as I said, it could also disrupt your home life. When a member of a family received Christ, the door was shut to him. Jesus said He came to bring a sword and separate family relations. Often people had to choose between the ones they held dearest and Jesus Christ, and when they chose Christ they were basically alienated from their families. The penalties further which a Christian had to suffer were terrible beyond description. I mean, we can read in history and we are told about Christians who were flown to the lions or burned at the stakes, but those were, in some ways, kindly deaths.

Nero wrapped Christians in pitch and set them afire and used them as living torches to light his gardens for parties. He sowed them in the skins of wild animals and sent his hunting dogs upon them to tear them to death. They were tortured on the rack. They were scraped, molten lead was poured on them. 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 it goes.

I mean, for many people, and even today in some parts of the world, coming to Jesus Christ and taking your stand for Him meant severe persecution. The Romans, of course, trumped up false charges against Christians. They slandered them as cannibals, slandered them for immorality. They accused them of having love feasts which were orgies of lust. They slandered them for setting fires, you remember, that they were always talking about the judgment of God, that God judged by fire and so they accused them of revolution...being revolutionary incendiaries and were even accused of burning down Rome. They accused them of destroying families. They accused them of political and religious rebellion. And, you see, the Roman Empire extended from what we know today as Britain all the way to the Euphrates, all the way to north Africa. And these Christians all over everywhere were exposed to one degree or another to this kind of attitude.

The emperor, of course, was a god in the minds of the people. And he demanded divine honors to be paid to him and temples were built to his divinity. It started slowly but eventually developed into a full-blown emperor-worshiping cult and it became the one unifying religious component in the Roman Empire. It became compulsory and once each year everyone had to go and burn incense to the

godhead of Caesar and say "Caesar is lord." Well this the Christians refused to do.

When a man burned his incense and said Caesar is lord, he received a certificate called "Alla Belis"(??), he could carry it around and prove that he had done it. Of course, Christians refused to conform. They chose Christ. They refused compromise. They became dissidents, a group of rebels, pockets of disloyalty threats to the Empire's solidarity, threats to Caesar. One poet spoke of this panting, huddling flock whose crime was Christ. So they faced torture.

Well Jesus then tells us in this beatitude that this shouldn't surprise us. There will be persecution for those in His kingdom. That's the who. Let's look at the how.

How is this animosity going to be expressed? Well He says it there, couldn't say it more clearly, they're going to be persecuted, from dioko, it means to pursue. It means to drive or chase away, finally to persecute, to harass, to treat evilly. Really, from 100 to 300 A.D. Christians were pursued from place to place, hunted like wild beasts and put to death by diabolical inhuman means which we referred to. And the Lord is simply saying you have to count the cost. Remember that, if you're going to become a Christian you need to know this.

There's an attitude being conveyed here. Blessed are those who have been persecuted, really kind of helps us to see more than just some kind of an act, this is a passive participle and it indicates a permissiveness. Blessed are those who have allowed themselves to be persecuted is the indication of the language. The idea is that they have willingly endured it. They don't run from it, they accept it. And it's a continuous, a passive perfect participle indicates continuous persecution. Blessed are those who have willingly allowed themselves to suffer continual hostility. Willingness is the issue. So we could say that blessed are the willing.

Persecution isn't always going to be intense. It's not always going to be there to the same degree. But these are those who are willing. If it comes, it comes. If we suffer, we suffer. If we suffer we shall also reign with Him.

This persecution takes various forms. Verse 11, sometimes it takes the form of reviling or as it's indicated in the NAS, "Blessed are you when men cast insults at you..." It literally means to get face to face with someone and abuse them to the face, oneidizo, to cast in one's teeth literally, to be face to face abused with unkind words that are vile and vicious. And not only do that did they do that but they also say all kinds of evil against you falsely. Not only do they say things to your face that are unkind and malicious and abusive and vicious, but they say things behind your back, insinuations, accusations, slander, lies. That's how it goes.

We who are Christians should expect a measure of that as God metes it out to each of us. First Corinthians chapter 4, the great apostle Paul says, "I think God has exhibited us apostles last of all."

You know, you would think we would be the premier ones, we would be the insulated ones. We might be like the 144 thousand and God would put a seal on us and protect us, but that's not how it is. We're at the bottom of the list. We're men condemned to death. We have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools or Christ's sake. He's sarcastic here, "But you are wise in Christ. We are weak but you are strong. You are distinguished but we are without honor."

He says...Look at us, we're weak and undistinguished without honor. Verse 11, we're hungry, we're thirsty, poorly clothed, roughly treated, homeless, toil, working with our hands. When we are reviled we bless. When we're persecuted we endure. When we are slandered we try to conciliate. We've become as the scum of the world. That's exactly what the word means, scum, the filth at the very bottom, the dregs, the residue that's left. That's us, the apostles. You would have thought they would be exalted, rather the world has hated them so that they have become as scum.

A.W. Pink wrote, "It is a strong proof of human depravity that men's curses and Christ's blessings should meet on the same persons." Who would have thought that a man could be persecuted and reviled and have all manner of evil said against him because he was righteous?

But, you see, such a life reproves the ungodliness of men and provokes therefore their resentment. It is more of the enmity of the serpent against the holy seed of Genesis 3:15. And so, Jesus is saying we need to expect it.

That leads us from the how to the why. Why does it come on us? Well we've already hinted at it but turn to John 15. John 15 and this is a text that must be understood in connection with this beatitude. John 15:18, who's going to be persecuted? Those who are kingdom citizens. How are they going to be persecuted? With face to face confrontation and slander behind the scenes, all kinds of forms of persecution. And why? John 15:18 Jesus said, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. But because you're not of the world but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." There's the answer, they hate you because you're not part of their system. You confront it by your godliness and your righteousness. You rebuke it, you cause the world to face its sin. Verse 20, "Remember the Word that I said to you, the slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My Word, they'll keep yours also."

In other words, however people treat Christ is how they're going to treat you. Verse 21, "But all these things they will do to you for My namesake because they do not know the One who sent Me." They don't know God. They don't know Christ. And they don't like you because you rebuke them...you rebuke them verbally, you rebuke them with your commitment to righteousness. Verse 22, "If I had not come and spoke unto them they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin, they've been unmasked and they don't like it. He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sinned."

In other words, the point He is saying is the things that I said exposed their sin. The things that I did exposed their sin. They had to face it. And as a result, instead of dealing with their sin they hated Me for it.

Let me tell you something, beloved. If you are righteousness living in the midst of unrighteousness, if you rebuke sin by your holy living, your uncompromising living, and if you rebuke it openly and lovingly but confront it and rebuke it, either someone is going to acknowledge their sin and repent or they're going to hate you for that.

Verse 25, "They have done this in order that the word may be fulfilled that is written in their law. They hated Me without a cause." Oh they had a reason but it wasn't a just cause. "I'm telling you these things...chapter 16 verse 1...because I want to keep you from stumbling." I don't want you to be surprised when it happens to you. "They will make you outcasts from the synagogue. An hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. And these things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me. But these things I've spoken to you that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you of them." I don't want you to be surprised when you're persecuted.

It happened. Andrew persisting in his preaching was ordered to be crucified. History tells us he was fastened with cords that death might be slow and remained in that condition until he finally died. Peter, tradition tells us, after nine months in prison was crucified head down. Paul, most likely, beheaded in Rome by Nero. James, Matthew, Matthias, Bartholomew, Thomas suffered martyrdom. Probably all but John.

Later came a Christian by the name of Aristides the Just, he was banished from Athens. When one of the citizens was asked why he had voted for banishment for Aristides, he said, "Because I am tired of hearing him always called 'the just.' It irritates me that people identified him as righteous."

I remember some years back when we were having an outreach at UCLA and we were doing some Bible studies and some open-air gospel presentations and passing out some gospel tracts and information on the campus. It irritated the leaders of the campus and so in the Daily Bruin came out with a special article, a front-page article and this is a quote that I took from it, this was their stand. This is going to stop right now, it must end...quote: "Because university facilities are not to be used for religious conversion," end quote. As if university facilities had anything to do with religious conversion in the true and purest sense. They didn't want anybody on their campus telling the truth about the matters that really count.

In Italy in the fifteenth century the Roman Catholic Church was corrupted. And when a man named Savonarola came along, he's always fascinated me...I've read through the years often about

Savonarola, I like his name, it just kind of...it's melodic, it's unforgettable. But he was one of the greatest Reformers, a sort of a pre-Reformation Reformer, in some ways in the 1400's. He was a great preacher. He was a great prophet in the sense that he stood up and said what needed to be said against the corruption of the Roman Catholic system. He faced politicians and they just hated it when he spoke. He denounced their sins. He denounced the corruption of the Church. He really prepared the path for the Reformation. His preaching was a voice of thunder. His denunciation of sin were so terrific that the people who listened to him went about the streets, it says, half dazed, bewildered, and speechless. His congregations were so often in tears that the entire church could be heard resounding with sobs and weeping. So they burned him at the stake. That will take care of that, they thought.

I remember when a young man in our church not too many years ago was sharing Christ in a park in Los Angeles at Seventh and Broadway. He was attacked because he was preaching boldly. Those who attacked him fractured his skull in four places. They rushed him to the hospital, drilled holes in his skull to relieve the pressure. In three days he entered the presence of the Lord. It's not so far away.

The world is hostile to the committed Christian. I remember one time when I was invited to Valley College over here to speak. They asked me to speak on Christianity and culture. That's a pretty generic subject. I thought...they think...they thought they were going to get some erudite philosophical message but I thought since there were so many Jewish students that I should speak on why Jesus is the Messiah. So it was an open forum deal and I just launched in to why Jesus is the Messiah unhesitatingly. And for about an hour I just waxed as eloquent as I could.

Well it stirred no small controversy and no small hostility. Some students were saved who later attended seminary and are to this day serving Christ. But Christian meetings were banned from the campus. Any distribution of Bibles or Christian books was banned from the campus. There was an office of the American Board of Missions to the Jews in North Hollywood at the time and a Molotov cocktail was thrown through the main window and exploded in there and they threatened to blow up Grace Church on a Sunday morning. Now when that occurs we never tell you about that because... They called my house and threatened my children, some members of I don't know what organization.

I had such a great time doing it there that a couple of weeks later I went to Cal State Northridge to repeat this. And I never got a chance to be heard because I was ringed by protesters who kept making so much noise the truth couldn't be heard at all. It's really sad, tragic, but it is reality.

Who are going to be persecuted? Those who are in the kingdom. How are they going to be persecuted? Well they're going to be slandered and they're going to be treated with insults face to face. Why? Because they have a message that people don't want to hear, it's a message about sin and judgment and righteousness and salvation.

Now the "why" also must be carefully understood here. This is not just a sort of generic religious persecution that comes from people who don't agree with any or every view. But I want you to notice going back to the beatitude, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness." And at the end of verse 11, "For My sake," or on account of Me.

I mean, even in Jesus' day some of the Galilean Zealots who were Jews who wanted to overthrow Rome had been persecuted, reviled, hated, and killed when they rose up against Herod or Rome. That's not the kind of persecution we're talking about here. This is qualified by the kind of persecution that comes to those who are Christians who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, the righteousness of God, for My sake, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Persecution of other people is not right. Buddhists shouldn't be persecuted and Muslims shouldn't be persecuted and Hindus shouldn't be persecuted and we should not do evil things to those in the Mormon faith or Christian Science or anything else. Cruelty and persecution on any other account though undeserved, however, is not in view here. We're not talking about just any kind of persecution. That's another matter here.

This is further defined for us in 1 Peter chapter 4. "If you are reviled...verse 14...for the name of Christ you are blessed." There's a commentary on that beatitude. If you are reviled for the name of Christ you are blessed. And how does that blessing come? "The Spirit of glory and God rests on you." Boy, what a promise. When you're being persecuted God's Spirit rests on you. The Spirit Himself is there attending to you. If anyone suffers because he's a Christian, verse 16, don't feel ashamed but in that name let him glorify God.

We're not talking about persecution for any and every reason. And even as Christians we're not talking about persecution for being just plain offensive. We're not talking about persecution that maybe you earned because of your arrogance. We're talking about persecution for righteousness sake because of who we are in Christ, because we name the name of Christ and because we believe in the true and living God. Back to John 15:19 where Jesus said they hate you because they hated Me. And you've identified with Me.

Because of what we are in Christ, because we bear His righteousness, because we proclaim His righteous standard and that all men who violate it are sinners and judged in the throes of judgment and desperately in need of salvation we become obnoxious. Poverty of spirit runs counter to the pride of the unbelieving heart. The repentant, contrite, mournful disposition that weeps over sin is not appreciated by the callous indifferent, unsympathetic, sinning world. The meek and quiet spirit which takes wrong and is not quick to strike back and which sees in itself nothing worthy is directly in opposition to the proud militant resentful spirit of the world that is consumed with its own selfish and self-serving attitudes. The craving after deep spiritual blessing, hunger and thirst for righteousness is contrary to the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life which dominates the world. Purity of heart contrasts painfully with hypocrisy and corruption.

But righteousness in itself is a rebuke...it's a rebuke. In this same chapter, Matthew 5 verses 44 and 45, Jesus said, "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." You need to pray for those persecutors who persecute you for righteousness sake, who persecute you for My sake. They really hate Christ and that's why they're treating you that way. Don't be under the illusion that people who don't know Christ are indifferent toward Him. Those who reject the gospel hate the Christ of the gospel and want nothing whatsoever to do with Him.

So, if I live a life that manifests the righteousness of Christ, if I live a life that manifests that Christ is in me and if He is demonstrably by the way I live and the way I speak my Lord and Savior, if I preach the clear message of the gospel, if I confront sin and call for repentance and offer the good news of forgiveness, there will be hostility.

We could ask the question when. When? Well, whenever. Hotanis used in this passage, it means whenever. Whenever men casts insults at you, whenever it happens, anytime it takes place. It's not going to be incessant as I said, and it's not going to be endless, it's going to happen. But anytime it happens we're called to accept it and find in it the path to blessing.

How is it that we are to enjoy this? How is it that we are to find ourselves in verse 12 rejoice and be glad? How is it? How can we get to that point in the midst of all of this? Well, that's a message for next Sunday night because there's a lot more to say about that. Suffice it to say at this point, happy are the hurting, happy are those who are persecuted because the Lord says so and the Spirit of grace and glory rests on them, that's Peter's explanation of that passage. God pours out His Holy Spirit in special measure on us in that time. We then expect it. We don't expect to go through this world making friends with everybody. We want to be loving. We want to speak the truth in love. We don't want to be cantankerous. We don't want to be unkind. We don't want to be ugly. We don't want to be arrogant. But we do want to speak the truth, right? And live the truth, take what comes.

And life takes on a tremendously clear tone. When you're uncompromising and you preach the truth, the truth will change people's lives and they will love you for it. But those who reject it will hate you for the exposure. That's how it is. So we go through life both making friends and enemies. But in it all God promises blessing. And we'll find out more about that promise next Sunday night. Join me in prayer.

This is so basic, Lord. We thank you again for reminding us of it. This substantial foundational teaching of our Lord gives us what we need to know at the very foundation level of our faith. To understand that persecution and false accusation and insults are part of the Christian's experience if he or she lives righteously. Not something we should run from but something we should embrace with gratitude and like Paul be able to say, "I bear in my body the marks of Jesus Christ," as if the

scars were a badge of honor. "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials knowing that those things test and prove and strengthen your faith." Knowing that the sufferings of this world are not worthy be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us we realize that if we suffer with Him, we'll reign with Him there. And in proportion to the measure of our suffering here will be the measure of our glory there. O we are indeed blessed. Make us people of the truth, people unafraid to live and speak as Christ lived and spoke, even if they treat us as they treated Him, we shall be blessed. And as He was exalted though rejected, He was exalted by the Father, so shall we be exalted and follow the very path of our Savior from suffering to glory. We thank You for this great truth and this promise in Christ's name. Amen.

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