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

The Only Way to Happiness: Endure Persecution, Part 2
Scripture: Matthew 5:10-12
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The Only Way to Happiness: Endure Hardship, Part 2

We don't have a lot of time tonight and I'm going to try to just maybe wrap up some of the thoughts that I didn't get to last Sunday night. I'm not going to keep you as maybe as long as I normally would, and that's probably good for me. But I want you to open your Bible to Matthew chapter 5...Matthew chapter 5.

Some time ago I was reading an article in a national magazine and that article talked about the fact that people are seeking happiness. And there was a some kind of a survey done. All of the information data was gathered from the survey by the people in the magazine, I believe it was Cosmopolitan Magazine. And it was studied by some psychologists who then yielded their findings. And the findings of the psychologists from the survey that was done by the magazine indicated that true happiness is found by those who find personal fulfillment apart from any self-sacrifice, who reach the goals that they establish for their own life and see their ambitions fulfilled and their desires gratified.

And you know what? I think that's probably accurate. I think if you look at the world around you, that's exactly the way they operate. And even those people who were surveyed who did not experience that and therefore really couldn't speak first hand about happiness could at least say..."Well, we assume that's where it is to be found."

And I suppose if you were to do your own little survey and ask people what do you think would be the source of true happiness in life, they would circle all of those issues. They would talk about having all your desires fulfilled, all of your dreams and ambitions and goals met. All of the anticipated joys of life somehow fulfilled, everything working out well for you and you not needing to make any sacrifices.

But in fact, that is absolutely the very opposite of what Jesus teaches in Matthew chapter 5 about happiness. Jesus says here that true happiness which is blessedness comes in the very opposite way. It comes not through personal achievement, it comes through a recognition of personal bankruptcy. Happy are the poor in spirit, not the people who have achieved great things but the people who know they've achieved nothing really significant. Oh they may have been educated. They may have made money. They may have been successful. They may have made their little mark somewhere in the world. But when they stand before God and look at their own heart in

honesty, they recognize that they are bankrupt, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Happy or blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. The really happy people are the people who have realized their spiritual bankruptcy and wept over their iniquity, wept over their lostness, wept over their being separated from God, wept over their hopeless condition, wept over their sin, wept over the anticipation, the prospect of hell, the judgment of God, eternal loss, wept over the utter lack of fulfillment of the heart.

And then in verse 5 it says, "Blessed are the gentle," or better the meek, "for they shall inherit the earth. And Jesus is saying here that true fulfillment in life comes in the very opposite way that you would expect it to come. True fulfillment in life, true joy, lasting happiness, real peace can only be granted by God. It cannot in the end and ultimately be found by man. It's not available in anything that man can achieve. It's not available in anything that man can attain to. It's not available to...in anything that man can buy. It's not available in anything that man might inherit or discover. In the end, real happiness, real soul satisfaction, true joy, profound peace comes when man realizes that it's utterly not available to him. He doesn't have it, he can't earn it, he can't buy it, he can't attain to it, he can't acquire it.

Having measured himself in all honesty he realizes his bankruptcy. Having compared himself with the law of God which requires perfect righteousness, he realizes he is nothing and he comes to God and pleads for God to do something in his life to bring about blessedness. That's really the penitent sinner. That's the person who's coming to God with the right attitude.

It's all really kind of summed up in verse 6, the fourth beatitude. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied." It's a matter of realizing you have nothing and you hunger for it. I've said this so many times through the years when people tell me they've witnessed to somebody, or talked to somebody about the Lord, or about the gospel, and there's no response. And I've said so often in my life, "Well that person isn't desperate enough. That person isn't hungry enough." And it's not just a hunger for something to fill the void. You'll notice here it's a hunger and thirst for righteousness. It's a weariness with sin. It's a weariness with the struggle. It's a weariness with guilt.

It's a weariness about always falling short of the law of God. Those people who are exposed to the law of God written in Scripture because they've been in a church, like you heard in the waters of baptism tonight, maybe they were raised in a Catholic Church where they certainly heard the moral law of God, they heard spiritual truth being taught. Some cases raised in a Christian family, as you heard from one young man who is in our seminary, how he was raised in a family where his father and his grandfather and I think one other member of his family were pastors and he was raised with all of that. Those people who are exposed to the law of God by knowing the Bible or being in a society where the Word of God is part of that society, they know the law of God. And when they're

honest enough to measure themselves against the law of God, they will come to a recognition that they are guilty, there upon that guilt leads to shame and remorse and by the grace of God can lead to the spiritual bankruptcy here.

But it's also very possible for someone who has not been fully exposed to the written revelation of God to feel the same weight of iniquity because the law of God is written in their hearts, isn't that right? In Romans chapter 2 the law of God is written in their hearts so their conscience is accusing them when they violate that law of God. Even a person who doesn't know the Bible, doesn't know Christianity still has the law of God written in the heart. It's just a part of being human. And that disobedience to that law brings about sadness, brings about guilt, brings about remorse which can also drive a person to the seeking of the truth. And how many times do we hear that testimony in the waters of baptism? I knew something was wrong, I knew my life wasn't what it ought to be. I became weary of my sin and I sought to know the truth. This is the path to real happiness. This is how one receives the kingdom of heaven. This is how one is truly comforted. This is how one in the end will inherit the earth. You will become the possessor of everything in this earth when the Lord comes down and establishes His earthly kingdom with His people.

Verse 7, it is people who understand mercy. I suppose we would, some people in our society, would assume that true happiness belongs to people who are merciless, who step on everybody's neck to achieve their goals. Man, that's what people believe. They believe you just take every opportunity to use everybody you can to get where you want to get and when you've finally gotten there, when you've reached the top of the pile you're going to find true satisfaction there at the expense of many people along the way. Those people who pursue that kind of self-satisfaction generally are merciless people. And Jesus says it's the merciful people who in the end find mercy. It's those who are compassionate. It's those who care about others.

It's the pure in heart, it's those whom God has cleansed who will ultimately see Him. It's those who are peacemakers who will be called the sons of God. We've worked our way through all of that. That's contrary to everything the world would assume.

You want to really be happy? Realize your spiritual bankruptcy, come to God who alone can grant you true blessedness. You want to be happy? Groan and mourn and agonize over your sin and failure in violation of God's law and He'll provide the comfort of salvation. You want to be happy? Be meek about your condition, not proud. Be broken and you will ultimately in the end inherit the fullness of the kingdom of God which includes this earth and ultimately the new heaven and the new earth.

You want to truly be satisfied? Then stop hungering and thirsting for things that don't fill and don't satisfy and hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God which He gives to those who believe in Christ. And so it goes. Pursue mercy, pursue purity, and be a peacemaker and this is true happiness.

But as we know, all of that leads to something and what it leads to is in verses 10 to 12. And that's the last of the Beatitudes. This is sort of the inevitable outcome here. "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," that's the beatitude, it's in verse 10. The people who are really happy are the people who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness. And what He is saying is that persecution is evidence that they belong in the kingdom of heaven.

Now I don't want to go back and review everything, but there are a couple of passages that I want to take you back to and one of them just very briefly is John 15. Turn back in your Bible to John 15 and verse 18 because this is a principle that must be understood. Jesus is talking to His disciples. He knows what they're going to face. He knows that now He is in the upper room, of course, with them, this is the Last Supper as it's often called and He's really teaching them what they need to know in His absence. And in verse 18 He says, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you." And the basic principle is if the world treated the most righteous person who ever lived the way they treated Him, why should you expect any better treatment? If they hated Him, and they did, they will hate you. And the reason they hate you is because you're not part of them. If you were of the world, the world would love its known, verse 19. But you're not of the world, I've chosen you out of the world therefore the world hates you.

And it doesn't always...that doesn't always mean that it's overt, aggressive persecution on every occasion. But there is a deep-seeded resentment and animosity by those who are a part of the system, to those who confront that system with righteousness.

Verse 21, "The slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." Verse 21, "They'll do this to you for My namesake." It's not that they, it's not that they really resent you as much as they resent Me. And that's really true. I mean, as a believer you can sort of, you know, wander through the world safely enough until you confront someone with the Word of God, until you confront someone with God's divine standards, or what Jesus has said. If you were to go, for example, to the Gay Pride Parade and announce what God says about homosexuality, you might experience persecution. If you were to engage yourself in any environment where sin is overtly being carried on and bring to bear upon the souls that are there the straightforward truth of God, you would experience persecution. You have probably experienced to some degree in the families that you're in if you have unbelievers in the family. And on occasion you have confronted the iniquity in the lives of those unbelievers. You have called them to recognize their sin and you have felt the animosity and the hostility. Nothing is more irritating, nothing is more offensive to an unregenerate person than to point out their iniquity and its consequences.

It's safe enough, in a sense, for me in the church. It's not quite so safe outside. They will persecute you, in verse 21 He says, for My namesake. It's because you identify with Me. It's because you say

you are Christ's. It's because you bring My name and My Word and My truth to bear upon them. They will hate you the way they hated Me. And verse 23, "And he who hates Me hates My Father also." I mean, this is a very, very complex issue. They hate the truth. They hate you for bringing the truth. They hate Christ for being the truth. They hate God because He is the true and living God behind it all. So they hate Me, they hate My Father, they hate you, they hate the truth.

Verse 6...verse 1 of chapter 16 He says, "These things I've spoken to you that you may be kept from stumbling." I don't want you to go out there in the world and all this persecution is going to come your way and you're going to fall all over the place and say, "Wait a minute, what's happening here? This shouldn't be going on. This is impossible. Why is this happening? We thought that the truth would be proclaimed with great power and they would all fall down and believe and it's not going to be that way." In fact, verse 2 says, "They'll make you outcasts from the synagogue and they'll kill you and think they're doing service to God."

I told you months ago that there are more Christians today this year, 1998, dying for the sake of the gospel than any time since the gospel began to be preached. There is great persecution of believers in the world.

One other passage that I would draw to your attention is 1 Corinthians chapter 4, and again it's just a brief review because it's such an important one. The apostle Paul sort of identifies how he's treated in the world. He says in verse 9 of 1 Corinthians 4, "I think God has exhibited us apostles last of all as men condemned to death because we've become a spectacle to the world." He says we're condemned to death in the end. We are a spectacle to the world. We're considered as fools, verse 10, we're considered as weak. We're without honor. We hunger, verse 11. We thirst. We're poorly clothed. We're roughly treated. We're homeless. Verse 12, we're reviled, that's cursed, blasphemed, persecuted, slandered. And then he closes by saying we are the scum and the dregs, we're the filth and the off-scouring, the filth that you scrape off a dirty pan in which food has hardened, that's us.

The bottom line is not popular with the world in any way, shape or form. Now in 2 Corinthians, I'm not going to go over that, we see that over and over and over and over again. Now with that kind of in mind, go back to the Beatitudes in chapter 5.

I really believe it's true if we are faithful to proclaim the gospel to an unbelieving person or an unbelieving environment, an unbelieving family, an unbelieving classroom, an unbelieving group at work or wherever it might be, if we are faithful to proclaim the gospel and to speak straightforwardly the truth of Christ and the truth of the living God to those who love sin, who love darkness more than light because their deeds are evil, the response is to be an inevitable hostility.

But we have to keep this in mind, it is the path of blessing. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. What is the kingdom of heaven? It's just the domain of God, the domain of salvation, the realm of salvation. That just goes with being a Christian. All of these things, the kingdom of heaven in verse 3, comfort, inheriting the earth, being satisfied, receiving mercy, seeing God, the beatific vision, being called the sons of God, having the kingdom of heaven again in verse 10, those are all synonyms for being in God's eternal kingdom. Second Timothy 3:12, "All that will live godly in this present age will suffer persecution." It's a question of degree, of course, we're not all being martyred. We're not paying with our life. We're not being imprisoned as some are. But in many cases, of course, we are not as bold as we ought to be. And we've gone into that. We've looked at that. We've looked at the principle here in this beatitude.

It is further defined in verse 11, and I'm just briefly reviewing and then we'll just kind of wrap up the end part of it. In verse 11, "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." And I think the Lord breaks down this one beatitude. He didn't break down any of the others, He didn't explain the others cause they were rather self-explanatory. But as soon as He says you're going to be persecuted, somebody is going to say, "Well what does that mean? Can You explain that further?" And so in verse 11 He doesn't repeat the benefit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven, so we know this isn't another beatitude, this is merely an explanation of the one He gave. What do you mean persecuted? He means when men cast insults at you. Sometimes that's what it's going to be. And as I told you last time, that's a face-to-face kind of insult, when people throw it back in your face and condemn you and insult you and do it face to face. That's what He's talking about here.

And sometimes that's all there is. We've all experienced that. There have been many times when I have endeavored to present the gospel to someone who has responded in an insulting way, wanted to hear nothing of it. You have perhaps experienced that yourself in those times when you tried to witness to an unconverted husband, or an unconverted son or daughter or family member or friend.

It also can mean they say all kinds of evil against you falsely. It's not just face-to-face abuse, and face-to-face unkindness and insult. It's some time behind your back they lie about you. They endeavor to undermine you. Boy, there's a lot of this. Certainly in my own ministry I have endured that. I mean, it's not that I'm suffering greatly from it, it...it's sad. When people ask me, "What is the hardest thing for you about the ministry?" I'm often asked that in a question and answer session. "What about the ministry is the most difficult thing for you to handle?" Inevitably I'll have to say this, what would be the most difficult thing for me to handle in the ministry would be anything in my life that discredited the integrity of my ministry. In other words, anything that I...that would cause someone to believe that I was not faithful to the Lord, that I was not faithful to the Word, that I was not faithful to honoring Christ, that I was not faithful to proclaiming the truth.

People know that about me. And there are those who will attack at that very point, who will say things that are not true. But having said them, they find people who will believe. And so in the eyes of some people you become severely discredited. That is a serious form of persecution because if someone believes those lies you literally then have nothing to do with them in terms of ministry. You have nothing to say. You're not believable. I mean, I have heard amazing things through the years. Not only have I heard on several occasions that I died which can't really be a criticism, I have heard things that, some of which I would never even repeat, attacks on my character, things said about me that were not true. There have been many who have tried to discredit the things I say by putting words in my mouth that I never said, saying I denied things like the blood of Christ and its efficacy and who knows, on and on, many things. That I have preached salvation by works. That's a form of persecution that's pretty serious. I frankly would rather have somebody step in my face and insult me than do that because wherever that's done there is serious discrediting and that just gives more reason for unregenerate people to reject the message because if they hear those discrediting statements then they assume that you're a hypocrite. And if you're a hypocrite you certainly can't have the truth. So persecution comes in many forms.

There are people, and you know them, they put stuff on the windshields out here in the parking lot, right? You've had them in your car. They stand on the corner over here and they pass out hate sheets. Some of you remember some two years ago when I was Moody at the Founders Week and I went into the auditorium, there are four thousand people there to preach that night and everybody was given a sheet of paper as we went in and it was a sheet of paper attacking me and calling me a heretic and it was single spaced on two sides of an eight and a half by eleven with all kinds of things that were untrue about me. The interesting thing about that was that it was being distributed by a man who knew me and to whose son I had given a scholarship to attend the Master's College, which he did. His father felt that he would do everything he could to discredit me.

Now that's not throwing me in a dungeon. Throwing me in a dungeon, I'm not asking for that, Lord, You understand. But...and there are some ways in which I would rather be in a dungeon with my integrity intact and my reputation intact than to be out roaming around preaching and having people believe I had no integrity.

But there are many ways in which persecution can come. You really want to be sure you live your life so that you can't legitimize any of those accusations, right? You want to be faithful. I don't want anybody to think that I teach something contrary to Scripture. And so people know that and so if they want to attack me, if the enemy wants to attack me, he concocts something about the fact that I'm a false teacher and then people drive up and down the street with a loud speaker and my name painted on the side of their truck, as you've seen out here, announcing to everyone that I'm a false teacher. The reason they do that...because they don't want to be confronted with the truth.

But there are all kinds of forms of persecution...many different ways. And the disciples needed to know that. I mean, there would be people, Jesus said, who will throw you out of the synagogue. There will be people who will think they do God a service when they kills you because they're protecting the true religion, namely in that case Judaism. There also will be people who will take this approach in persecution, they'll insult you to the face. I told you about some of those incidents last week where I was trying to speak at Cal State Northridge while people were shouting the whole time in my face so i couldn't be heard by the student body. There are those who do great damage, as I said, behind your back spreading lies.

I remember a few years ago when we were taken off 52 radio stations because lies were spread about me. And they began to believe that I was a heretic. Persecution comes in many ways and I'm just giving you the personal illustration from my own life, you have to experience in your life as it comes.

But He says now, this is what's so good about this, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted...Blessed are you when you are insulted, persecuted in this form, or when evil is said against you falsely on account of Me." Mark that, would you? On account of Me...it's not on account of you. I mean, if people are saying evil about you because it's true, if people are confronting you because you're offensive because you are offensive, that's not the issue here. This isn't some kind of pronouncement of blessing on anybody who suffers any kind of confrontation. This is...this is all about those who are persecuted because they are identified with Jesus Christ, that's the issue.

If you take My...if you take My cause, if you preach My gospel, if you speak My truth and they persecute you for that, blessed are you...blessed are you. And there's a lot of reason for that. I mean, we could sort of...sort of insert...can I insert James in here, just slide him in after verse 11? "Count it all joy when you fall into various...what?...trials." This would be a trial. "Knowing the testing of your faith produces endurance and endurance is a perfect work."

You know, these are...there are...there are so many benefits from trials. The first benefit from trials is that God uses them to elevate your dependence. Have you noticed that? You know, when false things are said about you, what are you going to do? When people reject you to the face, when you are persecuted for the cause of Jesus Christ, when you're accused of being narrow minded, dogmatic, unloving, divisive...a book has a chapter about me and they call me a heresy hunter...when those things happen to you, what can you do? You can't run around to everybody who has been influenced by those kinds of things and fix it. And yet it's so important to maintain the integrity of your reputation so that you can continue to minister to people. What do you do? You have nowhere to go but to the Lord and all you can say is, "Lord, You need to protect me if You want to use me. You need to protect me if You want to use me." And the Lord will respond by saying, "Well part of that...part of that protecting you is to keep you holy. And to keep you really holy so there never will be

any legitimate accusations it's necessary to keep you humble." And this is part of that breaking process.

In the pastor's conference this week one guy stood up and he said, "Now look," he said, "you've written so many books and you've sold so many tapes," and he said all of this kind of stuff. He said, "How do you stay humble?" He said, "If I wrote that many books and sold that many tapes, I'd be such an egotist nobody could live with me."

You know what the answer to that is? I'm not hear to announce to you that I've maintained my humility completely intact through the whole process, but I am here to say that whenever the Lord lifts you up, He breaks you down at the same time. Now there's always going to be enough disaster in your life and enough trials in your life and enough trouble and enough disappointment and enough heartache, and enough pain, and enough of that accusation and that criticism and that false statement about you to cause you to always reach back and realize that if there's ever going to be any impact in your ministry it's going to have to be by the mercy and grace of God. So James is saying count it all joy when you fall into various trials cause trials are a part of God's perfecting work. Trials elevate your dependence.

I mean, at this point in my life, and I know this is kind of a personal testimony approach to this tonight, but at this point in my life so many things are being said in so many ways, some very affirming, some very wonderful and very encouraging, and supporting. But I've taken on a lot of issues through the years and a lot of negative things and I can only say that if the ministry continues and if God continues to give us blessing and if God continues to use us in the days ahead, it will be because He has granted a measure of protection in the midst of this. And I'm grateful. And in your life He'll do the same thing...the Lord Himself is there to guard you and you should be happy about the persecution if it's for the truth...if it's for the truth.

And, you know, I can honestly say it's not something that I lose sleep over, it's not something you should lose sleep over. It's not something you should be pained by. It's something you should rejoice in. Verse 12, "Rejoice...don't just rejoice, be glad." He sort of doubles up on us there. "For your reward in heaven is...what?...great."

Can I give it to you simply? The more powerfully you proclaim Christ, the more clearly you live Christ, the more evident it is that you are Christ's. The more your life and your words, the loving, they are direct, confront this world, the more hostility you will receive on earth and the more reward you will receive...where?...in heaven. There's just always persecution there.

I've been reading the biography of William Carey, the founder of really of Modern Missions. And it's just really...it's really a thrilling thing to read. Here was this guy who was a...they said, "You're...you're a shoemaker." And he said, "No, I'm not even a shoemaker, I'm a cobbler, I can't make them I just fix

them." He was really humble...no education, no formal education. Eventually went to India as the first missionary of the British Missionary Society and translated the Bible into eleven languages. Taught himself Greek, taught himself Hebrew, taught himself Latin and taught himself to be a linguist all by himself while he was a cobbler. His wife didn't even learn to read until after she was married and they had children. Very humble origins.

He went over to India, this is just one little aspect of it, of the story, he went over to India and he's feverishly working in of all horrible places, Calcutta. Calcutta in the 1700's would be unimaginable, probably not a lot different, in some ways, than it is today, but even more primitive. And he's working on all these eleven translations. And back in England from which he needs support to carry on his work, just a minimal amount of support, just a little tiny bit, because he lived in very meager gifts, he needed money to make these translations to get them copied and get them in the hands of people. And there were people back in England who were accusing him of inventing languages and falsifying translation work to get rich. And the guy is in Calcutta giving up his life for the gospel.

And you want to find those kind of people, you know, and...(laughter)...and then...I mean, I do. If I'd been around England at the time, I would have told a few folks. But, you know, you have to remember...(laughter)...come to the aid of my brother, you have to remember that Jesus said, "Blessed are you when that happens for His sake," because you're a true kingdom citizen. That's just evidence that you, listen to this, are invading the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of darkness doesn't like it. Rejoice and be glad because when you get to heaven your reward will be great.

Two reasons to rejoice. The promise...you get the kingdom. The principle is you're going to suffer. The posture you take, third point, rejoice. In fact, rejoice a whole lot, just be flat-out glad about this for two reasons...I love this...first, your reward in heaven is great.

You say, "Well, isn't that sort of selfish?" No, because it's the reward born out of a pure motive which is to honor God. Right? It's a reward born out of an identification with Jesus Christ that says I will serve Jesus Christ for His honor and His glory and the sake of His gospel no matter what comes. You'll have a great reward in heaven.

I believe the church is depicted in Revelation as the twenty-four elders and when they receive their crowns, remember, they're shown with crowns. They take those crowns and they cast them at the feet of Jesus Christ. In the end He gets all the glory but we will have a great reward for suffering on account of Him. In fact, you remember that the disciples, James and John, came to Jesus and said, "Hey, we'd like to sit on Your right hand and left hand in the kingdom." And Jesus said, "Wait a minute, that's not Mine to give." Then He went on to talk about those who suffer most. It's not going to be those who had the best publicity agent, it's not going to be those who had the widest audience on television, it's going to be those who suffered most purely on account of Him who will receive the greatest reward.

The assumption here is that there are variations in reward. That's true. There are variations in reward. The apostle John said this in 2 John, I believe it is, "Look to yourselves that you lose not what you have wrought." In other words, you better be careful or you might lose your reward. You could have had a reward coming but forfeited it by some sin...which is to say you can have more, or you can have less. The rewards will vary. There will be some who receive a great reward and some a lesser reward. And it's related to faithfulness. It's related to self-sacrifice. It's related to one who has no regard for himself. Like Paul said, "I don't count my life dear to myself," Acts 20, "I just want to finish the ministry God's given me." It doesn't really matter what happens to me. "If I live, I live," he said, "if I die, I die, it's immaterial."

So, you've got to get your eye on the heavenly reward. And you know, that gets kind of exciting. You look at persecution with a different perspective, insults or false accusations, whatever. You look with a different perspective. And even perhaps some day I would think some of you have lost your job because of your faith. Some of you may have lost a marriage partner because of your love for Christ, on account of Him the husband walked out and left you with children to struggle. Rejoice. If it was on account of Christ the first great promise is you will receive a great reward in heaven. Just a reminder, heaven lasts forever. So there won't be any limit to your enjoyment of it.

I just happen to believe, this is another message, that eternal rewards are connected to service there. I don't think they're buttons that you wear. I don't think they're capes you wear. I don't think they're stripes on your sleeve. And I don't think they're crowns stacked up higher and higher on your head. I think it is a capacity for service. Greater reward means that you will have a greater capacity, a greater opportunity, a greater privilege of service.

The second thing is equally a wonderful promise. "Rejoice and be glad when you are persecuted for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." You are in some pretty classy company. That's right. If you're persecuted for the cause of Christ, you're in some pretty good company. The first one that comes to my mind is Hebrews 11, Moses was willing to suffer the reproach of Christ, right? Said no to being the son of Pharaoh's daughter, said no to all the wealth and prestige of Egypt and identified himself with his people and took what the writer of Hebrews calls the reproach of Christ. You stand in line with Moses.

There were many others, all those wonderful, faithful prophets...Isaiah who most likely was sawn in half as referred to in Hebrews 11. Jeremiah who was cursed and thrown in a slimy pit. And many others, as you know who paid a serious price for their representation of God. You remember when Jesus was indicting the city of Jerusalem. He said, "You that stonest the prophets and murderous those that are sent to you." And you remember when He told the parable about the man who owned the vineyard, and he had let somebody run the vineyard for him, that was depicting God as the owner of the land and the nation and the Israelites running it. And he sent his messengers to them and they

killed them all, that again was an indictment of Israel for killing the prophets. And finally he said, "Well, I'll send My Son," you remember and the owner of the vineyard sent the son and they murdered the son. Jesus certainly is the supreme prophet. He was persecuted for the sake of His Father even to death. Persecution puts you in some pretty fast company. It's a pretty classy group. What a privilege, isn't it, to wear the uniform and be considered a soldier like so many others.

After all, we'll close with this, you're going to have to confront so you might as well consider it joy to do it. The reason you have to confront is in verse 13, "You're the salt of the earth. If the salt has become tasteless, how is it going to be made salty again? It's good for nothing anymore except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men."

Look, if you're not an agent salting the world, you might as well get out of here, right? I mean, if you're not salt in the wound of sin, what good are you? You're the light of the world, verse 14 says. You better shine, nobody..nobody lights a lamp and puts it under some kind of basket to hide it. What's the point? You put it on a lampstand. It's like a city set on a hill. If you were...if you were walking around in Palestine in that day, there weren't any street lights as such. There weren't any great sources of artificial light. If you were in a valley and there was a city on a hill, at night you would see all the candlelight, all the lamplight coming out of the openings. That's a city set on a hill, you can't hide it, can't put something over it. The sky is so dark there, you see the light so clearly. You're the light. Nobody puts it under a basket, they put it on a lampstand. "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who's in heaven."

Isn't that an interesting twist at the end there? There will be some who will see the light and they will give glory to God. There's some hope there, isn't there. There really is. There's some hope if they see the pattern of your life, if they hear the truth that you proclaim, there will be some who will glorify your Father who's in heaven.

We have a world to reach in whom we shine, Philippians, as lights in the darkness, right? For many, they're not going to listen, they're going to resent. Like God told Isaiah, they're going to have ears that don't hear, they're going to have eyes that don't see, they're going to have a heart that is hard. But there's going to be a remnant out there, going to be some who will hear and believe.

That's the reason I'm so committed to doing baptismal services because I want you to know that there are people out there who will hear, who will see your life and will believe by the grace of God. And we see them week after week after week here. We can have that confidence. Sure there's persecution, sure there's animosity. The kingdom of darkness reacts in a self-protective way as you invade with the truth. That's why the hostility comes. But God turns that earthly hostility into heavenly glory and uses it because it's the bringing of the truth to turn some hearts to salvation.

So we go in this beatitude passage all the way from being a broken, bankrupt, mourning, meek, hungry sinner to living a life that so dramatically effects the world that on the one hand they persecute us and on the other hand there are some who believe our message and give glory to God. I mean, that's the sum of all of our life, isn't it? And it is to that that the Lord calls us and it is in that that we find our true happiness. Join me in prayer.

Father, it is a joy unspeakable and full of glory to share in this company of the redeemed. Who are we and why us? We're overwhelmed that You would have chosen us for Your kingdom, that You would have by the Holy Spirit convicted us of sin and righteousness and judgment and broken us against Your law, that You would have caused us to grieve over our sin and to humble ourselves and cry out for a righteousness we did not have. We are amazed that You selected us to receive Your mercy, to be purified in heart and to become peacemakers and to count us among the prophets, count us among those through the ages who have named Your name and proclaimed Your truth. Ah, we are so privileged, so honored to be included among those in the past and even the future as well as the present who are persecuted for their righteousness sake, persecuted for Your namesake, persecuted on account of You. What a privilege to stand with them.

Father, we can't even imagine that our name would ever belong in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews with the heroes of the faith. But by Your grace we are there. We are this generation's heroes of the faith, we who are faithful, we who are kingdom citizens truly and genuinely, we who live and proclaim truth at any cost. Thank You for the privilege of standing with them and running the race that is set before us with endurance, laying aside every weight and the sin that does so easily beset us that we might be faithful to the One who ran the perfect race, our Lord Jesus Christ. Father, use us mightily to be that salt and that light at any cost knowing that while there will be hostility there will also be the opportunity to bring men and women to the place where they will glorify You by believing the truth. Use us greatly for that. We pray in our Savior's name, and everyone said, amen...amen.

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