

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series:	The Beatitudes	Pastor/Teacher
Number:	9	Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Matthew 5:10-12	
Date:	August 2, 2020 (a.m.)	

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED . . . FOR CHRIST'S SAKE

This is the final beatitude. As we look back over the preceding beatitudes, we are struck by the *contrast* between those who are described here as subjects of the Kingdom and the rest of humanity! They are so utterly different! You would think that a people like this would be highly esteemed. But that is not the case. In fact, it is just the reverse. They are persecuted. Note that this beatitude follows the beatitude that deals with peacemaking. “If a Christian is a peacemaker this is what happens to him.”¹ Elsewhere we read, “If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: *No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.* Look back over the list and note how this key thought, *for Christ's sake*, transmutes poverty of spirit into heavenly humility. It is this that brings comfort to those who mourn and plenty to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. This is the consolation to those who show mercy and the source of purity to the pure in heart. Finally, it is the foundation of peace in the peacemakers. If we would understand the beatitudes, it is to this expression we must turn our attention. “It forms,” notes Warfield, “the great determining motive of the Christian life.”²

- I. **CHRISTIANS MUST EXPECT PERSECUTION.** I point out once again the fact that each beatitude is linked with all the others. “The Christian is persecuted,” writes Lloyd-Jones, “because he is a certain type of person and because he behaves in a certain manner.”³ This beatitude tests our ideas as to what a Christian really is – and if he is Christlike, then he will be persecuted. (cf. 2 Timothy 3:12; cf. with 1 Peter 4:15-16).
 - A. **Persecution.** The Greek word is *dediōgmenoi*. The root of this word is *diōkō*. It signifies to follow hard after a thing. It is sometimes used in a positive sense (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:15 – “Follow that which is good;” Hebrews 12:14 – “Follow peace;” 1 Corinthians 14:1 – “Follow after love;” Paul uses the word in Philippians 3:14: “I press toward the mark”). The concept is one of pursuit, to press after or striving to attain. One Greek lexicon has “to follow with haste, and presumably with intensity of effort in order to catch up with, for friendly or hostile purpose.”⁴ Here the word is used in a hostile sense.
 - B. **The Nature of the Beatitude.** Martyn Lloyd-Jones gives us some examples of what this does **not** mean: “It does not say, *Blessed are those who are persecuted because they are objectionable.* It does not say, *Blessed are those who are having a hard time in their Christian life because they are being difficult.* It does not say, *Blessed are those who are being persecuted as Christians because they are seriously lacking in wisdom and are really foolish and unwise in what they regard as being their testimony.* It is not that. There is no need for one to elaborate this, but so often one has known Christian people who are suffering mild persecution entirely because of their own folly, because of something either in themselves or in what they are doing. But the promise does not apply to such people. It is *for righteousness' sake*. Let us be very clear about that. We can bring endless suffering upon ourselves, we can create difficulties for ourselves which

are quite unnecessary, because we have some rather foolish notion of witnessing and testifying, or because, in a spirit of self-righteousness, we really do call it down on our own heads. We are often so foolish in these matters. We are slow to realize the difference between prejudice and principle; and we are so slow to understand the difference between being offensive, in a natural sense, because of our particular makeup and temperament, and causing offence because we are not righteous. So let me put another negative. We are not told, *Blessed are the persecuted because they are fanatical*. Neither does it say, *Blessed are the persecuted because they are over-zealous*. Fanaticism can lead to persecution; but fanaticism is never commended in the New Testament. There are so many temptations that tend to come to us in the spiritual and Christian life. Some people, even in worship, seem to think that they must say their *Amen* in a particular way, or must say it often. Thinking that this is a sign of spirituality, they make themselves a nuisance at times to others and so get into trouble about that. That is not commended in Scripture; it is a false notion of worship. The spirit of fanaticism has also very often led people into grievous difficulties. I once remember a poor man who not only brought suffering upon himself, but also upon his wife on account of his zeal. He was over-zealous, and he was not facing some of the injunctions given by our Lord Himself, because he was so anxious to be testifying. Now let us be careful that we do not bring unnecessary suffering upon ourselves. We are to be *wise as serpents, and harmless as doves*. God forbid that any of us should suffer because we fail to remember that. In other words we are not told, *Blessed are they who are persecuted because they are doing something wrong*, or because they themselves are wrong in some respect. You remember how Peter put it in his wisdom, *let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer*. Let us notice, also, what he put into the same category as murderers, evildoers, thieves and so on – *busybodies in other men's matters* (see 1 Pet. 4:15).⁵

II. **WHY CHRISTIANS MUST EXPECT TO BE PERSECUTED.** It is generally agreed that verses 11 and 12 expand upon and give further explanation and application to verse 10.

A. **By Whom Are the Righteous Persecuted?** The Apostle Paul declared that the unrighteous *hate God* (Romans 1:30), the carnal or natural mind is *enmity against God* (Romans 8:7 KJV). The righteous are visible representatives of God and, as such, are the objects of this hatred. A. W. Pink wrote, “The wicked hate God’s holy image and those who bear it, His holy Truth and those who walk in it.”⁶

1. **The Devil.** He is called the *accuser*. Satan stood to accuse the high priest (Zechariah 3:1); He accuses the brethren day and night (Revelation 12:10). He is called our *adversary* (KJV) or *enemy* (NIV) who prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).
2. **The World.** By this is meant the wicked and ungodly. Genesis 3:15 speaks of the natural enmity between the godly and the wicked. The world is in captivity to the devil (1 John 5:19, cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4 where he is called the god of this world).⁷

B. **The Manifestation of this Persecution.** There are two specific ways this is shown.

1. **Direct and Physical.** Note Jesus’ words in John 16:2: “They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the time cometh, that he that killeth you thinketh he doeth God good service” (cf. Acts. 26:9-11 and Paul’s account of his persecuting the church).
2. **Slander.** “and say all manner of evil against you, falsely.” This last word is a translation of the word *pseudomenoi*. We have derived from this our English word “pseudo” which we attach to something that is a sham, something spurious or counterfeit. The Greek word means to speak a lie. This is action done deliberately. Why is this done?

- a. **Ignorance.** There are two types:
 - 1) *Willful* ignorance (cf. Romans 1:21-28)
 - 2) *Blind* ignorance (cf. 1 Timothy 1:13). Unlike that willful ignorance which increases guilt (cf. Romans 10:3), blind ignorance stems simply from not knowing (cf. 1 Timothy 1:14 with 2 Timothy 1:3).
- b. **Prejudice and Malice.** (cf. Jude 1:10)
- c. **Envy.** (cf. Matthew 27:18; Acts 17:5)

III. ***THE PROMISE TO THE PERSECUTED.*** Note how this beatitude ends with exactly the same promise attached to the first beatitude. Note also that this concluding beatitude is not a description of the citizens of the Kingdom as such, but shows the *results* of how non-citizens of the Kingdom will respond to Christ's subjects.

- A. ***The Condition.*** The promise is made only to those who are persecuted "for righteousness sake."⁸ This in turn is identified in verse 11 with the person of Christ – "because of me."
- B. ***The Motive.*** It is for "his name's sake" that our sins are forgiven (1 John 2:12). It is for Christ's sake that we are accepted by God (Ephesians 1:6). It is because of Him that we have our righteousness, holiness and redemption. (1 Corinthians 1:30). It is because of Him that we have the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). The greatness of the motive rests on the greatness of Christ's work for us. As Warfield urges, "As He has stopped at nothing for our sakes, so we must not stop at anything for His sake."⁹

CONCLUSION: J. R. W. Stott makes this helpful observation, "The beatitudes paint a comprehensive portrait of a Christian disciple. We see him first alone on his knees before God, acknowledging his spiritual poverty and mourning over it. This makes him meek or gentle in all his relationships, since honesty compels him to allow others to think of him what before God he confesses himself to be. Yet he is far from acquiescing in his sinfulness, for he hungers and thirsts after righteousness, longing to grow in grace and in goodness."¹⁰ We are exhorted in Colossians 3:17 that "Whatsoever ye do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him," and a few verses later we read, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward" (3:23, 24). Let us be recognized by friend or foe as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

ENDNOTES

¹ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon On the Mount I* (Eerdmans, 1949), p. 128.

² B. B. Warfield, *Faith and Life* (rpt. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1990), p. 36.

³ Lloyd-Jones, op. cit., p. 128.

⁴ J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domain I* (United Bible Societies, 1989), p. 202.

⁵ Lloyd-Jones, p. 130.

⁶ A. W. Pink, *Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* (rpt. Baker, 1949), p. 40.

⁷ The Puritan Thomas Manton wrote, "Christ is the head of one party, and Satan of the other. Christ hath introduced truth and holiness, and the devil is the principle and architect of all wickedness and cruelty and hatred; therefore since he worketh in the children of disobedience, and they are taken captive by him at his will and pleasure, is not the hand of Satan in all of this?" *The Works of Thomas Manton I* (rpt. Maranatha, N.D.), p. 253.

⁸ In v. 6, "righteousness" is a future object for which the citizen of the Kingdom hungers and thirsts: here (without the article) it is a quality for which they are persecuted. Cf. A. H. McNeile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (MacMillan, 1949), p. 53.

⁹ Warfield, op. cit., p. 40.

¹⁰ J. R. W. Stott, *The Message of The Sermon on The Mount* (IVP, 1978), p. 54.