**Blessed and Persecuted**

**God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right,
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.**

**God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.” Matthew 5:10-12**

1. **Blessed: The Way – to Life**
2. **Persecuted: The Way – that Jesus Walked**
3. **How to follow close to Jesus when Persecuted**

**Ask God for His Help**

**Thank God for the Blessed Life and Great Reward in Heaven**

**Remember Jesus and the Ancients**

**Pray for Others who Walk through Persecution**

God Blesses Those Who Are Persecuted

When looking at what I would speak on this Sunday, the door was open to speak on a number of things. I know that we have been going through the sermon on the mount and I thought that I would like to keep going after last weeks sermon on salt and light but I was also aware that having guest speakers in etc , not all verses got covered from the previous verses and on of those verses was:

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    for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.**

**11“God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. 12Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.” Matthew 5:10-12**

Jesus said some shocking things. It was meant to. He comes and comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.

I wasn’t completely pumped about talking on this subject. Let’s all just get pumped about suffering – persecution. Nobody likes to camp out on the thought of persecution. I can speak on the next verses…then I turn on the news and see the stories of the religious minorities getting trapped on a mountain in Iraq by Issis and their desperation. It has become a humanitarian crises as it appears that the intention of Issis is to put thousands to death. This is very real and though not on such a wide scale – the reality for quite a few Christ followers in the world.

I remember hearing about persecution when I was really little. Like Christians getting tortured and put to death for being Christian. Maybe some of those stories are best not shared in front of kids.

I had older brothers and they are wonderful now - lend me their vacation house during sabbatical, all kinds of kindness. But when you are kids….wow, the older brother things they did - it would definitely come under the category of bullying by todays’ standards.

My parents had to do some shopping and left all us kids in the car. They had parked in front of a big sign saying “No trespassing. Violators will be prosecuted.” Big difference between prosecuted and persecuted – but I was just learning to read. My brothers convinced me that it said persecuted. It was taking a long time for my parents to come out of the store….couldn’t see them. They convinced me that our parents were being held in the store and persecuted. And that the people inside would soon be coming out to persecute us. I’m not going to lie – they had me crying. How mean!

Got to say though – I think now as a result all that residual guilt works to my benefit as they make up for the years of torture I endured. My brothers I now count as some of my best friends.

In our Canadian society – you may get prosecuted while doing good – you may even get prosecuted for holding to certain christian beliefs. It is not legal to physically persecute someone because of what they believe.

There are certain ways in which these words come home. As a Christ follower, holding to certain ideas or standards – people mock that.

Nobody enjoys that. It could be that holding to standards of justice in a work setting and refusing to compromise could result in getting dismissed or fired or maybe not getting a promotion.

“Be happy about it! Be very glad!”

That should get us questioning whether Jesus was loopy. Do you ever sit and hear someone’s troubles and say “Be happy about it! Be very glad!” They would ask you what planet you are on. Suffering is bad. Any kind of suffering – whether it be getting mocked and left out of a group of friends or suffering from exposure and hunger on the mountain in Iraq.

So Jesus wraps up his “God blesses” statements with the final statement. “God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right.”

There is a reason for Jesus making this his final blessing – when you live according to the blessed life – the way – it will be so evidently out of step with culture that you will stand out and that will be one of the reasons you will be persecuted. Different is often seen as bad.

**The Way to a Blessed Life**

Matthew 5, 6 and 7. Sermon on the Mount. Don’t know exactly the mountain but it would have been in the Galilee region above the lake and close to Jesus’ hometown of Capernaum. We went to a hill above the lake where they think it could have been spoken. It was a peaceful and beautiful setting where you would just love to build a house.

Jesus sat down and began to teach.

It’s just unbelievable poetry in a way. I want to invite you to close your eyes while I read this. You have been going through these blessings in the

The Beatitudes

**3**“God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him,
    for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.
**4**God blesses those who mourn,
    for they will be comforted.
**5**God blesses those who are humble,
    for they will inherit the whole earth.
**6**God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice,
    for they will be satisfied.
**7**God blesses those who are merciful,
    for they will be shown mercy.
**8**God blesses those whose hearts are pure,
    for they will see God.
**9**God blesses those who work for peace,
    for they will be called the children of God.

The Beatitudes – won’t find the word in the bible but it is a Latin word for blessed.

Blessed is “divine joy and perfect happiness” In the world that Jesus was speaking it was the kind of joy experienced only by the gods or the dead.

People’s response “You mean I can experience this kind of life? This is possible here and now? I don’t have to be a god – it’s attainable. I don’t have to wait until after I die?” This is great news.

People were captivated by Jesus speaking because it was an invitation. It was not another heavy burden.

Intro: Read the Blessings – Matthew 5:3-9

This is a sermon that invites a response.

**A Declaration: I want God’s blessing in my life.**

Say it out loud.

This is the key. Live this way, may it be something the God generates out of your spirit.

Being blessed implied an inner satisfaction and sufficiency that did not depend on outward circumstances for blessing. This is what God offers….if we trust him.

Beatitudes represent and outlook radically different from the world.

**Reasons for Persecution Type Suffering**

**Different is Scary.**

– it’s scary

**Good living can make bad living feel exposed.**

**Working for justice puts a target on you from powerful evil people.**

Standing with the weak can cause the unjust system to rise against you.

**Unseen Evil Powers.**

 Everybody agrees that things are broken. People just don’t agree on why they are broken. The bible teaches about a personal evil and evil powers that are at work in this world. It rises up against everything that is in the person and character of Jesus. When Jesus is lived out and declared and you move forward –there is push back.

All of these reasons is what got Jesus mocked, persecuted and killed. The difference is that God himself was at work behind the scenes and Jesus in fact gave himself to the mockery and persecution and death. He lived in perfect blessing from the Father God because he realized his need for God, he honestly mourned, he was perfectly humble, he hungered and worked for justice, his mercy was completely given in his death, his heart was perfectly pure and he was working for our peace with God through his death. He is now enjoying the kingdom of heaven in fullness.

People counted it an honour to suffer for him. I know that there are extremes – it can be like masochism. People doing dumb stuff just to get in on suffering. We don’t look for suffering. But it’s helpful if you can get some handles as to why the suffering is happening – what might be behind it.

**Blessed and Persecuted**

This is the world that we live in. That is what Christ offers. The alternative is a life not following Jesus – apart from him. The expectation full participation in blessing can’t be there if not following Jesus in the way of the blessings.

Jesus never did a bait a switch. He laid it out there. There was enough in the sermon on the mount to tick everyone off. There is enough in the sermon on the mount to bring inspiration and hope and life to everyone who trusts and believes.

Jesus made an ongoing invitation to follow him. He laid out the benefits – he also candidly talked about suffering and how that will be a part of life.

Illustration: American ads for prescription drugs. You watch them and they show a happy middle aged or elderly person going about happy activity and testifying to the benefits of taking the drug. Then a background voice comes on strong to tell you all the possible side effects and people who need to get checked out before taking the drug. It seems so ominous and mysterious. Why would you ever go there? Is that the kind of deal Jesus was inviting us to?

Would you rather go the Canadian way of the American way? Rather hear the big voice saying all the potential risks than just getting the fine print. Living in the dark.

No – here is the deal. This is life. The best that prescription drugs can do is prolong life – give you a better quality of life for the maybe 70-100 years. You will have life, real life with Jesus now and a forever life with Jesus in heaven.

Good news – You are blessed

Bad news – you will be persecuted

Good news – the kingdom of heaven is yours

Good news – God blesses you

Bad news – people will mock you, persecute you, say all sorts of evil things against you

Good news – you will be happy and glad because you are looking forward to something greater than this life. You are the blessed ones who know the meaning of life. You are the ones who have discovered the paradox to healthy living. You are the ones who are in the company of the greats who the world was not worthy of having.

Illustration; Watched an PBS show all about eating right and eating beans and salads and living healthy. As part of the doctors expert recipe for healthy living – he said to go and help someone else. The blessed life truly living the sermon on the mount – even secular wisdom supports this. I don’t know whether this doctor has read the sermon on the mount but he is finding this to be hardwired into the living experience.

Those that experience the kind of suffering that is intense talk about the unbelievable peace and joy that is encountered. Dietrich Boenhoeffer who was persecuted and died in a death camp in Nazi Germany because he stood up for justice for the Jews. Him and others speak of an otherworldly and incomprehensible peace in the middle their suffering. They speak of being blessed even in it.

I am willing to suffer for you and with you because I am so confident I will also share eternal glory with you.