

The Rock: 06-12-2022**A year with the master**

Title: Blessed are those who are persecuted

Scripture: Matthew 5:10-12

(Black bible Pg. 759 ESV)

Theme:

Learning how to follow Jesus and finding joy in living out these beatitudes, understanding the notion which Jesus teaches this week, that persecution is the result of right living.

Introduction:

We come to the end of this section in Matthew, the beatitudes, and it seems Jesus ends on a down note.

After having learned a few weeks ago what it meant to be a peace maker, we find this week that even when we do everything right, in fact, because the Christian does these things, shines in the dark places, persecution comes.

It is such a sharp turn here that it almost seems counter-intuitive to us. How, or even why, if I am making every

effort to live right in God's eyes, will I be persecuted for it?

That is a great question. One that, if it is to be understood, needs to be seen in light of the why? Why am I persecuted? Because Jesus doesn't simply say people will be blessed because of persecution.

As if persecution, any persecution gives you the kingdom of heaven. That's not what He says.

But first, let's take a look at the reward here, because Jesus book-ends these beatitudes with the same promise - The Kingdom of heaven:

-Matthew 5:3 (ESV)

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

-Matthew 5:10 (ESV)

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

There is, at least for these two beatitudes, an other-worldly reward, a future reward for number one, an emptying of yourself, and number two, being like Jesus in this world.

The call here, of Jesus' challenge is a bit different. All of the statements that

we have gone through so far give us the, "blessed are those".

This particular one, it seems, at least initially, to be directed right at His disciples. Because He says here in this last beatitude, "blessed are you."

As if He turned and looked directly at them, and no longer at the crowd around Him and said, "listen, at the moment, you are the only ones who will understand this, the only ones who will feel this and deal with this.

What is this? It is persecution, not so much for being a follower of Jesus, although that will come. But persecuted for "righteousness sake".

In other words, they will hate you like they hate me, because you shine my light onto and into the dark places and that then, brings conviction to the very core of who they are.

As a result of that, because they do not like that, you will be persecuted.

The Story:

This is something we don't want to miss, because it does make a very big difference. There is much persecution in this world. Political, personal, religious belief, ethnic persecution.

Many people are fighting for good causes, protesting for good reasons, and are put in jail at times for their actions.

While noble, they are not necessarily righteous. If we think back to the beginning of the year when we looked at Jesus and His ministry, we found in Luke, that He defined what His work and ministry would look like. We touched on this actually last week in Psalm 73:

-Luke 4:18-21 (ESV)

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Let me ask you this: Is there anything at all wrong with that? No. Jesus came to fix things, to heal people, to bring freedom, to help the poor and needy, the orphan, and the widow.

Yet, He was despised and hated. Why? The heart of humanity. When light shines in dark and prideful places, darkness hates it, and looks for ways to fight back:

-Luke 4:28-29 (ESV)

"When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff."

Not the response you would expect, is it. Yet that is what He got. They didn't like what He said to them, and they didn't like what it meant for them.

You see, we can do all these things that Jesus tells us to, and God the Father is happy in it, and we are blessed because of it, and still...

We can and will be hated by the world and the darkness which rules here. To think, that because persecution happens to us, we must be doing something wrong, is, well, wrong.

Yet, the challenge for us as followers of Jesus is to ask ourselves the why question. Why is this happening to me, why am I being persecuted?

Is it because of my ministry, "Jerks for Jesus", where I am an obnoxious person as I go through life? Constantly calling people out and telling them all the wrongs they do and that they are going to hell.

Do I attach myself to a political cause and make that the prime mission of my life? At the same time, the Gospel, takes a back seat as secondary?

Many a Christian end up in trouble because of good causes, and are persecuted and ridiculed for the stance, but is it for righteousness sake?

What do I mean by that? Well, let's think on Jesus and our studies of His life so far. There have been moments, such as in Capernaum, where He did nothing except read the Scriptures and declare their fulfillment.

His statement, and the fact that He existed was enough to want to throw Him off a cliff. The declaration that He was the Messiah whom they were waiting for.

He actually had done nothing wrong. In fact, He had done nothing except to declare God's truth. That, in this world, is enough to make people mad.

Jesus is saying to the disciples here in Matthew, and now to us all these years

later: "Listen, you will do everything right in the eyes of our Father in heaven, and you will still be wrong in the eyes of the world, and because of that, you will be persecuted.

Bonhoeffer in Discipleship makes this statement:

The reviling word, the deadly persecution, and the evil slander seal the blessedness of the disciples in their communion with Jesus. Things cannot go any other way than that it unleashes its fury in word, violence, and defamation at those meek strangers. The voice of the poor and meek is threatening, too loud. Their suffering is too patient, and quiet. In their poverty and suffering, this group of Jesus followers gives too strong a witness to the injustices of the world."

-Discipleship Pg. 110

There is "righteousness sake" persecution. So many times, it takes no words. In fact, for us to really understand it, let's think in terms of action. The simple doing of life day to day, in the way Jesus calls us to.

For example, and yes it can be this simple. Being kind to an unkind person, in a very unkind world. It needs to be so

much more than that, but it certainly can never be less than that.

In a world full of unkindness and meanness, being kind shines a light which contradicts the darkness and the prince of darkness.

The devil and the darkness that he brings into this world cannot stand light, cannot handle truth, and cannot handle the quiet submissive kindness of the follower of Jesus, most especially when they continue in that way after being persecuted.

Light and darkness simply cannot co-exist, and when we live in such a way, where we find ourselves fighting the darkness of this world in the way Jesus did and commands us to, the world will hate us. Even when we are doing everything right, and doing so toward them.

Think on Jesus and His confrontation with Pilate. We find it in John's gospel and chapters 18 and 19. Jesus has been arrested and tried in a sham trial, simply because He is a threat to their power.

Keeping in mind, he never threatened to take over, He simply kept speaking to them of their hearts. Of their incorrect

ways in which they were living. Light in the darkness.

That gets Him arrested and He finds Himself before the one man who can free Him. Pilate knows this:

-John 18:33-38 (ESV)

"So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

What is truth? Well, He is standing right in front of you and they are asking you to kill Him because He keeps telling the

truth. Persecuted because He has revealed their hearts.

-John 19:5-11 (ESV)

"...Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!" When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him." The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God." When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."

Jesus was not persecuted for political reasons. He never threatened their power base. He never protested policy and kings and their offices.

Yet, He did. He did so when He challenged their hearts, when He challenged them at the heart level before God, when He

exposed the darkness of their heart, mind and soul.

He did so, not so He could have the upper hand. Rather, he did so as a way to call them to repentance, but they wanted nothing to do with Him.

Persecuted for righteousness sake.

As a follower of Jesus, you can, and often will find that you are doing everything right, living as God has called you to, and loving as you should, and still, you will find those who will fight against you, accuse you and persecute you. Why?

Jesus makes that clear too:

-Matthew 5:11 (ESV)

"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account."

On my account, and for righteousness sake. That is why. It is because of Jesus! Count yourselves worthy of His kingdom when this happens.

So, what can we do? What are we to do? Well, as I said a few weeks ago, and many times before: Be kind, at times be silent, and always look to do good, even

to those who are unkind, mouthy and constantly do bad.

We cannot control how people act or respond toward us, but we can control how we respond and act toward them. We can choose our course of action in every situation.

The meekness of Jesus kept Pilate from being turned into a crater. Why? Because He knew that even though the cross awaited Him, that was God's sovereign plan, and that Pilate too, was a part of it.

Light shines in the darkness, and we love that. But we need to remember that darkness hates the light. So when you shine, not everyone is going to think good things.

Love them anyway. You see that is the Christian life in a dark world. That is the hard part of working out our salvation. Responding to things in a way which God is glorified, even if we suffer consequences as a result.

Lloyd-Jones said something that I had to really work through, but I find it helpful and maybe you will to, and we will close with this quote and a couple comments:

"To become like Him, we have to become light; light always exposes darkness, and the darkness therefore always hates the light. We are not to be offensive; we are not to be foolish; we are not to be unwise; we are not even to parade the Christian faith. We are not to do anything that calls for persecution. But by being just like Christ, persecution becomes inevitable."

**-Studies in the Sermon on the Mount Pg.
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We are not to do anything that calls for persecution. Being a follower of Christ in the world will bring that about, simply because we are living the life of glorifying God and looking to build others up in the light of who Jesus is.

When we love the unlovable, knowing that we too can be and are that unlovable person, that will unsettle someone who cannot reconcile how a Christian could love simply because it is the right thing to do.

When we become the voice for those on the fringes of society who have no voice. Doing so because injustice, as the Bible sees it, cannot go unchecked.

When we hold those in power accountable because they are using God's image

bearers as pawns in their grand power schemes. We must do so in the way Jesus held people accountable.

Simply saying we have come to proclaim freedom, in other words: "What you are doing is wrong, you are mistreating them."

These are gospel things, righteousness things, Jesus things. We cannot change the world. In fact, we aren't called to, so don't think in those terms.

Think in terms of your local sphere of influence, and that will be enough. Because righteousness has a ripple effect, much like skipping a rock over a pond. The rings keep going out farther and farther.

"Never worry about numbers, help one person at a time and always start with the person nearest you."

-Mother Theresa

Doing so, even when they hate you for it.

-Matthew 5:12 (ESV)

"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Pray

