

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 19 March 2023. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Beatitude Attitudes (Part 5)

Matthew 5:10-12

As most of you know, I had the privilege of growing up in a Christian home, and of attending a Christian school; and in this protective environment, I wasn't faced with any great opposition for being a Christian. Now, to be sure, even in my Christian school, there were many kids who, despite being surrounded by the Gospel, had never truly been born again; and they did poke fun at those who loved the Lord, and who were trying to serve Him. However, it wasn't until I began to work a job at age 16 that I began to experience a whole new level of reproach for following Jesus. Co-workers openly mocked me; and one supervisor, who was deep into witchcraft, and who hated the name of Jesus, did his best to accuse me falsely of insubordination, so that he could write me up. In general, people mocked me for trying to live a holy life. I still remember a conversation one day after work, when I was waiting for my dad to collect me. A couple co-workers sneeringly asked me why I didn't go to the parties, and drink alcohol, and do drugs, and commit fornication, as everyone else did; and I told them that as a Christian, I cannot do these things. They laughed and said, "Just wait. In another six months, you'll be just like the rest of us."

Was this persecution? Yes. There are all different levels of persecution, ranging from mocking words to physical torture and death. One thing is certain, though: if you be a true follower of Jesus, you *will* suffer some level of persecution. The reality is that Christians in most societies have, over the last 2,000 years, suffered terrible persecution for Christ. In the latter part of the 20th century, a Russian journalist named **Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn** spent eight years in the Siberian concentration camps for writing something critical about Stalin; and after his release, he wrote a couple books named *The Gulag Archipelago* and *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, which he smuggled into the West. In these books, he described the unspeakable torture that prisoners experienced every single day. However, one of the things that blew Solzhenitsyn's mind was the godly testimony of the Baptist believers whom he met in the camps. He said that the Baptists were the ones who were the most hated and vilified, and the most brutally tortured. In fact, his novel, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, is about a prisoner named Ivan, who knows a Baptist prisoner named Aloysha, who is serving 25 years in prison for proclaiming the Gospel. Despite the fact that Aloysha was starving, just like everyone else, he was amazingly content with his imprisonment, and even thankful to God for it. In his prayers, he didn't even ask for more food rations: instead, he asked for spiritual blessing and power. He once told Ivan, "We shouldn't pray for somebody to send us a parcel, or for an extra portion of (soup)...What people prize so highly is vile in the sight of God! We must pray for spiritual things, asking God to remove the scum of evil from our hearts." Solzhenitsyn described the Baptists as incredibly zealous to spread the Word of God to others. It was for this very reason that the Soviet authorities feared the Baptists. Since the Baptists' goal was to baptise and disciple "***all nations***," they saw the Baptists as a threat to their power. Yet, the Baptists whom Solzhenitsyn observed were not insurrectionists: they were incredibly meek and mild. Nonetheless, they were treated like the worst of criminals. Yet, no matter how slandered they were, everyone knew that they were the "real deal." Solzhenitsyn said that "They were all honest, free from anger, hard-working, quick to help others, devoted to Christ. That is why they are being rooted out with such determination. In the years 1948-1950, several hundred of them were sentenced to twenty-five years' imprisonment, and dispatched to Special Camps *for no other reason* than that they belonged to Baptist communes."ⁱ

Rejoicing in midst of persecution is the mark of a citizen of the Kingdom; and it is the last of Jesus' eight Beatitudes. Jesus said, "***Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the***

kingdom of heaven.” This morning, we will learn what it means to be persecuted for righteousness’ sake; and we will learn what kind of “*reward*” Jesus promises to believers who are persecuted for righteousness. The title of this message is *The Beatitude Attitudes, Part 5.*

Read Matthew 5:10-12.

I. The reproach from sinners (vv. 10-11)

Here in **verses 10-12**, we come to the last of the eight Beatitudes. Jesus says, “***Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.***” Now, every one of these eight beatitudes is extremely important; yet, it seems that Jesus considers this eighth Beatitude to be *extra* important. For one thing, He placed this blessing *last*—as though this were the most vital truth of all. Secondly, Jesus repeated this blessing for a *second time*. Not only did He say, “***Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,***” but He *re-stated* this blessing, with additional clarification. He adds, “***Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.***”

Why did Christ place so much emphasis on this Beatitude? Because He knew that His followers were going to *need* this reassurance, in a big way! Jesus’ disciples had *already* experienced persecution, even while Jesus was with them; but they hadn’t seen anything yet. After His resurrection, Jesus sent them out as “sheep among wolves,” to proclaim His Gospel to a hostile world. To this day, we still are taking the Gospel to people who hate us, persecute us, and often kill us. Yet, Christ says that we may *rejoice* when we suffer for His name.

How long will this persecution continue? Until Christ returns to earth to set up His glorious 1,000-year Kingdom. Right now, we are in the interim between Christ’s first and second coming; and this interim is made up of two parts—the church age (which we are in right now), followed by the seven-year Tribulation period. After we church-age Christians are caught up to Heaven in the Rapture, the Tribulation will begin down on earth; and the Lord will raise up 144,000 Jewish evangelists to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world. Multitudes of Jews and Gentiles will be saved! However, the price for being a believer during the Tribulation period will be martyrdom. Those who believe on Christ during those seven years will experience the *worst* persecution in history. Yet, even in the midst of the most horrific persecution in history, the believers in Jesus will be able to “***rejoice, and be exceeding glad.***”

Do you see why this Beatitude is so important—and why it is so unique to *Jesus’* followers? What prophet ever told his followers, “Come follow me, and be persecuted; and you will be blessed”? That doesn’t sound like an attractive “selling point,” does it? What founder of a religion ever *guaranteed* his followers that they would suffer greatly for his name? *No one* ever said such things—none, that is, except Jesus. Lost people down through the centuries have been confounded as they watched Christians *rejoicing* in the midst of trial! In Roman times, spectators in the arenas were amazed by the sight and sound of Christians’ singing praises to Jesus, even as they were being burned to death, or devoured by wild beasts. In fact, spectators were sometimes so convicted by the Christians’ testimony for Christ, that they cried out to Jesus to save them, and then left their seats, and went down to the arena to declare their newfound faith in Jesus, so that they, too, could have the honour of dying for Him!

Why is it a joy to suffer for Jesus? Because of *who He is!* If Jesus were a mere man, this wouldn’t make any sense. However, Jesus isn’t just a man: He is *God*. He is our Creator, who loved us so much, that He condescended to take on human flesh, and became a member of our race, just so that He could pay the punishment for our sins on the cross. How could we *not* consider it an honour to suffer for such a loving and faithful Creator?

By the way, when you look closely at **verse 12**, you can see that Jesus is actually declaring His deity. (**Read verse 12 again.**) Do you see what Jesus is saying here? First, He says, “Blessed are you when you are persecuted for my sake”; then, He compares *our* persecution for *His* sake to the persecution that the *Old Testament prophets* suffered. And for whose sake did the Old Testament prophets suffer? For *God’s* sake. Jesus is saying that *suffering for God’s sake* is the same as *suffering for His sake!* Indirectly, yet unmistakably, He is claiming to be God.

With this in mind, please look again at **verses 10 and 11**. (**Read verses 10 and 11.**) In **verse 10**, Jesus says, “**Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake**”; but then, in **verse 11**, He says, “**Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you...for my sake.**” To be persecuted for *righteousness*’ sake is the same as to be persecuted for *Jesus*’ sake, because Jesus *is* Righteousness. This means that those who are enemies of righteousness are enemies of Christ. When they hate Christians, it is really *Christ*, and His righteousness, that they hate.

Read John 15:18-25 and 16:1-4.

For the believer, persecution should come as no surprise. We should completely expect it, because the world will *always* hate Jesus and His righteousness. Now, this doesn’t mean that we should go around with a “persecution complex,” taking offence at the slightest thing, and saying, “Oh, woe is me! Gloom, despair, and agony on me! Nobody loves me, everybody hates me, guess I’ll go eat worms.” What it *does* mean is that we should be prepared to suffer reproach for Jesus *with rejoicing*, whenever reproach does come to us. The word that Jesus used to describe the world’s treatment of us is *oneidismos*, which is translated as “**revile.**” This word means “to upbraid, disgrace, or reproach; to mock or insult.” It also means “to cast unjust blame on someone, and to call for his punishment.” Here in the West, we don’t often suffer physical death for Jesus’ sake; nor do we often suffer physical assault (although cases of assault *are* sharply increasing). However, what we *do* often suffer is “reviling.” Being falsely blamed, and being mocked, *are* forms of “**persecution**”; and we should not be shocked when we experience it. How should we react to it, then? The way Jesus did. In **1 Peter 2:23**, Peter reminds us that Christ, “**when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.**”

Read 1 Peter 4:12-16.

Brethren, there is a right way to react to suffering, and there is a wrong way to react to suffering. Getting angry at your enemies, and lashing back at them with harsh and bitter words, is *not* the right way. Our Master did not react this way to His persecutors; and neither should we. There is also a *right reason* to suffer, and a *wrong reason* to suffer. Just because you’re suffering in this life doesn’t mean that you are suffering for Christ. Many Christians suffer in this life because they are being *disobedient* to God. They put their own plans and ambitions first, and shove the things of God into the margin of their lives; and then they wonder why things aren’t going well for them. They make sinful choices, and then wonder why everything is going wrong. They *aren’t* being poor and meek in spirit; they’re not doing much mourning over their sin; and they are not hungering and thirsting after righteousness, nor being merciful. Their hearts often are *not* pure, because they aren’t filling their hearts with God’s Word, and submitting to Him; and they are not peacemakers, because they are filled with bitterness. Living this way brings its own consequences (as well as direct chastisement from God). Thus, if you are living in disobedience, and your life is full of trouble, don’t dare say, “I’m suffering for Jesus,” because you are *not* suffering for Him. You’re suffering the consequences of your own sin. If, on the other hand, you are living in submission to God, and

are walking with a pure heart, yet you are being persecuted for it, you are being persecuted for the *right* reason. And what can we expect when we are being persecuted for righteousness' sake? Happiness! Jesus says, "*If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye.*"

In **Revelation 3**, the Lord commended the church of Philadelphia because they had kept His Word, and had not "*denied*" His "*name*." Despite the persecution that they were enduring, they had stood fast for the name of Christ: and the Lord rewarded them by giving them an "*open door*" of witness. Brethren, this should be our heart's desire. To be given an "*open door*" of witness for Jesus' name is the highest honour that the Lord could possibly give us! Yet, it requires courage—a courage that many modern Christians do not have.

None of us in this assembly has experienced tremendous persecution for the Lord. Compared to the suffering of our brethren in many other countries, our suffering is light. Yet, even in our comparatively free society, we know what kind of reaction that we may expect if we speak too loudly about the Lord Jesus Christ. Persecution for Jesus' name is not limited to any age bracket. I personally know children in our schools who are suffering tremendous cruelty, bullying, and abuse from their peers (while their teachers turn a blind eye to it), simply because of their stand for Jesus. If you stand for Jesus' name, you *will* be persecuted to one degree or another! How, then, will *you* react to the persecution, Christian? Do you decline to mention the name of your Saviour in everyday situations, for of fear of getting a dirty look, or being mocked? Do you blush to speak His name? If you be afraid to speak His name above a whisper *now*, how would you stand for His name if your *life* were at stake?

The mere *mention* of Jesus' name can bring persecution. However, that certainly is not all. Let's look at **verse 16** again. (**Read 1 Peter 4:16.**) You'll notice that in this verse Peter says, "*If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed.*" Not only can you expect to suffer for standing for Jesus' *name*, but you can also expect to suffer "*as a Christian*." What, exactly, does it mean to suffer "*as a Christian*"? To answer that question, let's go back and look at how the name "Christian" was coined in the first place!

Read Acts 9:1-2 and 11:25-26.

Before Christians were called "Christians," they simply called themselves "*followers of the way*." The "*way*" that they were referring to is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He is "*the way, the truth, and the life*." To follow in the "*way*" of Jesus Christ means not only to be trusting Christ for salvation, but to be "*walking*" in the *way of living* that Christ commands His people to walk. The whole reason that Christ saved you was that He might come into your life, and empower you to live a life that is pleasing to Him. In **Colossians 2** Paul urged Christians, "*As ye therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.*"

The Roman world of the first century could see the Christ-like conduct of the "followers of the way": and thus, they called them "Christians," after the One in whose way they were walking. The *believers* didn't give themselves this name: their *enemies* gave it to them. Their enemies meant it as an insult; but to the believers, it was an honour to be named after their Saviour. To "suffer as a Christian," then, means to suffer for "walking in the way" of Jesus Christ—for living the way that Christ commanded. It's one thing to *call* yourself a Christian. Multitudes of unsaved people in this world call themselves "Christians," yet don't suffer for their profession one bit. Why? Because they don't live the way of Christ at all! However, when a person truly gets saved, and begins to live his life in the way that Christ commanded, he *will* suffer in some way. It may be in the form of mockery. It may be in the form of being coldly snubbed by friends and neighbours. It may be in the form of lack of advancement in the

business world—or even of losing one’s job. I personally know some Christians who never advanced in their career, or who even lost a job, because they refused to participate in deceit and corruption. Losing one’s job for the sake of one’s Christian beliefs is becoming increasingly common these days; and living the life of a Christian is requiring more and more courage. Do *you* just “go with the flow,” Christian? Can people around you see that you are a genuine Christian, because you actually live the way a Christian should live? Or do you try to blend in with the world, without bothering your conscience too much?

Standing for the “*name of Christ*” will bring persecution. Living your life “*as a Christian*” will bring persecution. But there is more! Let’s look again at **verse 19** again. (**Read 1 Peter 4:19.**) According to this verse, Christians can expect to suffer “*according to the will of God.*” Suffering according to *God’s will* is the right way to suffer. Yet, how can you know that you are suffering *according to* God’s will, and not *contrary* to His will? Well, it’s really quite simple. Let’s see what Paul had to say about it.

Read Acts 24:14-16.

If you are consistently obeying God in every area of your life, and confessing your sin as soon as you become aware of it, you *can* have a conscience “void of offence” before God. This is not merely theory: it is a scriptural promise. Is *your* conscience clean, Christian? Are you obeying Him in every area? Or is your conscience uneasy, because there is something not right in your relationship with God, with your spouse, with your children, with your employer, with your co-workers, or with other believers? Is there any sin that you are hiding away in your heart, and not forsaking? If so, then how can you have any confidence that when suffering comes your way, you are suffering “according to the will of God”? You can’t! There will always be that guilty thought in the back of your mind, “I wonder if God is allowing this suffering in order to chastise me?” If, on the other hand, you are obeying Him, and you are walking in the light, you will know, when suffering comes, that God willed it for your *good*, and that He has a purpose in it. Are you suffering for the right reason, Christian? Are you standing for Christ’s name? Do you have a conscience void of offence before God?

In order to suffer in the right way, you must suffer for the right reason. Yet, there is another requirement. In order to suffer in the right way, **you must suffer with the right reaction.** Peter says that we should “**Think it not strange**” when fiery trials come. Why, then, are we so often surprised, and *embittered*, by suffering? I fear that it is because we have been influenced by the thinking of the world. The world thinks that they are *entitled* to a comfortable life; therefore, when bad things happen, they blame God. Worldly people think of God as a sort of senile, doting old grandfather, who should give them whatever they want, when they want it: and they certainly do not believe that God should allow them to suffer. They say, “If there is a God, then He must be a cruel God to allow all this suffering in their world.”

That is the *world’s* thinking. However, as Christians, our thinking should conform to God’s thinking. As believers, we have already committed our souls to Christ for safekeeping until the day of the Resurrection. However, committing (or “entrusting”) your soul to Christ involves much more than trusting Him for your soul’s salvation. It means trusting Him with your whole *life*. It means that whether you have to suffer for His name or not, you are confident that He is doing “a good work in you,” and that He has a purpose in it. Therefore, no matter what is going on around you, you can “**rejoice, and be exceeding glad.**” **Why?** Because suffering for Jesus’ name brings great *reward*. This brings us to our last point.

II. The reward from the Saviour (v. 12)

(Read Matthew 5:10-12.) In the very first Beatitude, Jesus said, ***“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*** Now, in the eighth Beatitude, Jesus repeats this promise. He says, ***“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*** Two times (at the beginning and at the end of the Beatitudes), Jesus specifically promises that those who possess these eight spiritual qualities will possess ***“the kingdom of heaven.”*** He gave this same promise in the third Beatitude, except in a slightly different way. He said, ***“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.”*** Jesus is promising Jewish believers that they will inherit the “promised land”—the land of Israel. This is a wonderful promise; but has this promise been fulfilled yet? No! Christ’s followers definitely are not inheriting the earth right now. Our world lies under the power of the wicked one; and wicked, unjust men rule over our countries, provinces, and cities. When *will* this promise be fulfilled, then? Peter answers that question in **1 Peter 4:13**. Peter says that this promise will be fulfilled ***“when his glory shall be revealed.”*** When will this happen? At the end of the Tribulation, when Christ returns to earth to set up His kingdom. At that point, *every* eye will see Him in His glory! Jesus says that we can “rejoice” when we suffer for His sake, because the day is coming when His glory will be revealed, and when He will set up His 1,000-year Kingdom on earth. In **Revelation 22:12**, we are told that on that day, His ***“reward”*** will be ***“with”*** Him, to give to His servants. And what kind of reward will that be?

Read 2 Timothy 2:8-12.

This is the reward that awaits Christians who are patient through suffering. We literally will “reign” with Christ. Dozens of times in the New Testament, we are promised that we will be given crowns, and sit upon thrones, and rule over cities and nations, during the glorious 1,000-year Kingdom of Christ. We will receive these rewards according to how faithfully we served Christ during our time on this earth. Then, after the 1,000 years are over, and eternity begins, we will reign with Christ throughout eternity, in the new earth that God will create!

Christian, God has many wonderful rewards for you, if you will have the heartfelt attitude of rejoicing through your sufferings in this life! The wicked may cast their long shadows on this side of eternity. They may harass and persecute God’s people. However, when the Lord Jesus Christ appears in glory, they will be cut down like grass. We may not see our Saviour’s face now; ***“yet believing,”*** we are able to ***“rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.”*** Yet, what is the greatest reward that we can receive for our suffering? The greatest reward is that through our suffering, *God is glorified*. Remember what we read in **1 Peter 4:14**? We read, ***“If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.”***

Now, as you suffer for Jesus’ name, the lost people around you may not *seem* to recognise God’s glory through your suffering. They may think you a fool, and tell you so. However, you may be assured that any time you suffer for Christ, He is using your suffering to bring glory to Himself. Whether or not it *seems* that your testimony is making any difference, do what is right, anyway. There may just come that ***“day of visitation”***—that day when God’s Spirit finally gets hold of that lost person’s heart, and draws him to Christ, and that person gets saved! When that day comes, that lost person will ***“glorify God”*** with you, because of the seed you planted in his heart. Because *you* were faithful to the Lord, even when that person called you a crazy “cult member,” God used your testimony to draw that person to Himself!

As we close this morning, I would like to tell you a story of persecution—and of forgiveness. It’s a story from the lives of **Richard and Sabina Wurmbrandt**. The Wurmbrandts were Romanian Jews, who, in the late 30’s, heard the Gospel, and became fearless servants for Christ. (Both of them spent many years in Soviet concentration camps, after the Russians took over Romania.) Throughout WWII, Richard was a pastor; and throughout the war, he and his wife won countless souls to the Lord. It wasn’t just the “nice” people that they led to the Lord, either: they also led the most wicked, bloodthirsty enemies to the Lord. When the Nazis were occupying Romania, they gave hiding and quarter to Russian soldiers; and after the Russians took over, they hid and gave quarter to Nazi soldiers: and some of them came to know the Lord. One of these was a man named **Borila**. Borila was a Romanian who had been indoctrinated by the Nazis in his youth; and he had eagerly volunteered to murder hundreds of Jews in the province of Transnistria. One evening, Borila (who had just met Richard through a mutual acquaintance) spent the evening chatting with Richard in his apartment; and as they talked, he bragged about all the Jews he had murdered. (He did not yet know that Richard and his wife were Bible-believing Christians, much less that they were Jews!) In the course of the conversation, it became evident that this man had, more than likely, *personally* murdered Sabina’s own parents, siblings, and other family members when he was stationed at Golta.

At this point, Richard revealed his Jewish heritage to Borila, and informed Borila that *he* was the murderer of his wife’s family. Borila jumped up from his chair; but Richard said, “Wait, I want to try something. Let’s do an experiment. I’m going to wake up my wife and tell her who you are, and what you’ve done. And I can tell you exactly what will happen...My wife won’t speak one word of reproach to you,” Richard assured him. “In fact, she’ll hug you like you’re her brother, and she’ll bring you the best supper she can find in this house.”ⁱⁱ

Bewildered, Borila asked Wurmbrandt why his wife wouldn’t demand his blood, for having killed her family. Richard explained, “‘If Sabina, who’s a sinner like all of us, can forgive and love like this, imagine how Jesus, who is perfect love, can forgive and love you. If you will turn to Him, everything you’ve done will be forgiven.’ Borila’s hardened exterior crumbled. Confronted with guilt and forgiveness, the killer clutched his shirt with both hands and ripped it apart. ‘Oh, God, what do I do? What do I do?...I’m a murderer. I’m soaked in blood. What do I do?’”ⁱⁱⁱ Richard then explained the way of salvation to him; and in simple faith, Borila asked Christ to forgive him of all his sins, and to save him. Then, true to his word, Richard went and woke up his wife Sabina, told her who this man was, and what he had done to her family, and how he had just repented and received Christ as his Saviour. And guess how she reacted? She gave Borila a hug, and wept with him for a good while. She then made a delicious supper for him. After that evening, Borila abdicated from the Nazi army; and in time, he became one of Wurmbrandt’s closest friends and co-workers in the Gospel.

Perhaps you are thinking, “Pastor, I could never forgive someone like that.” If so, you are absolutely right. In yourself, you can’t: but in Christ, you can! All the righteousness that we’ve been talking about in the Sermon on the Mount is available through the power of your Saviour. You see, when you got salvation, you got Jesus; and when you got Jesus, you got all the suffering that comes with being associated with Him. Enduring suffering isn’t what saves us (we who are saved know that); it is God’s grace that saves us. Suffering is simply what you can expect if you have truly placed your faith in Jesus. You can *expect* that people will say “***all manner of evil against you falsely,***” for Christ’s sake. However, if you will stand fast for the Lord, your reward in Heaven will be great! You can “***rejoice, and be exceeding glad.***”

Conclusion: The spiritual qualities that Jesus described in the Beatitudes certainly do not manifest in all their fulness overnight. There is a process of *change*, which the Holy Spirit effects in the Christian step

by step, as that Christian yields to God. However, make no mistake about it: the Lord *can* change you into the image of His Son, if you will let Him! Love the Lord, Christian. Serve Him always. Rejoice in the suffering that you are going through for His sake. **Perhaps you are not sure that you are saved.** If so, I urge you to repent of your sin, and place your faith in Jesus Christ today! Will there be suffering for Jesus' name if you place your faith in Him? Yes. However, Jesus is worth it! Believe on Him today!

ⁱ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* (Vol. 3, V-VII, trans. Henry Willetts), p. 108.

ⁱⁱ The David C. Cook Team, *Wurmbrandt* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook publishing, 2018), pp. 66-67.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p. 67.