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## Blessed are the persecuted

The last of Jesus' beatitudes is,

"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in this same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Matthew 5:10-12



Blessed, truly happy are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness.

I can hear the thoughts, "Happy are the *persecuted*? You've got to be kidding! I don't think so!"

And yet, here it is, the last of the Beatitudes. In fact, Jesus spent as much time on this one as almost all the other Beatitudes combined. We need to have a good handle on this!

First, we need to make the distinction between persecution for righteousness and punishment for sin. We see it in 1 Peter chapter 4.

"If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory, and of God, rests upon you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name" (14-16).

Punishment for foolish, hasty, wrong, sinful actions should never be thought of as "suffering for Jesus."

One thing to soak in is the certainty of persecution. The kinds and degrees of persecution will vary greatly, but all faithful believers will experience persecution. Listen to what Jesus told us,

"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they

persecuted Me, they will persecute you as well; if they followed My word, they will follow yours also” (John 15:18-20).

And recall what the apostle Paul wrote, “all who want to live in a godly way in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12).

While it is difficult to determine how many people are martyred for believing in Jesus, or how many Christians suffer under other forms of severe persecution it is clear that, as one person stated, “there are many places on earth where being a Christian is the most dangerous thing you can be.”

Why are we to be, how can we be truly happy when, because of being persecuted for our faith? Jesus said, “for [yours] is the kingdom of heaven ... rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great.”

We have seen this aspect of happiness before in verse 3, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” It begins and closes the Beatitudes. It is a summary of the true happiness of kingdom living. When we place our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior, we enter the kingdom of heaven, receive everlasting life, receive true happiness. It is ours now, always, forever.

This true happiness is ours forever in heaven, and it is ours now. Romans chapter 5 verse 17 tells us, “those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.” Reigning in life now includes,

- enjoying every spiritual blessing in Christ;
- enjoying continual cleansing from sin, whatever it may be;
- continual victory over temptation and sin, whatever they may be;
- personal fellowship with God through Jesus;
- experiencing the quality of life God designed for us;
- our faithfulness being used by God to accomplish things which last for eternity;
- our faithfulness being used by God to bring glory to Himself.
- All of these, and more, are part of the blessing of true happiness of kingdom living, of being in and living out the kingdom.

True happiness grows and thrives in kingdom living. Yes, “blessed, truly happy, are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Pastor Lyle