

Blessed Are (Part 5)

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[0 : 00] Jesus. Tonight we're going to finish the section on the Beatitudes by studying verses 10-12 of Matthew!

The second section in Matthew 5, verses 3-12 has the same Greek word translated as blessed in English, and here's the definition of blessed one more time.

Biblical blessedness is a state of joy and well-being that does not depend on physical, temporary circumstances. With that definition in mind, let's read Matthew 5, verses 3-12.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

[1 : 19] Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. And now here's the new material for tonight, and you'll hear a distinct theme. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you, and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Do you see the theme of verses 10-12? The emphasis, obviously, is on persecution, but verses 10-12 still build on the Beatitudes we've already studied.

The central theme of the Beatitudes is righteousness. The first two relate to recognizing our own unrighteousness. The next five relate to seeking and reflecting righteousness.

And now the last Beatitude relates to suffering for the sake of righteousness. Last week we covered the Beatitudes dealing with the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers.

[2 : 27] Those Beatitudes were in verses 7-9. John Scott described how the verses 10-12 relate perfectly to the previous three. He said, The condition of being despised and rejected, slandered and persecuted, is as much a normal mark of the Christian discipleship as being pure in heart or merciful.

Every Christian is to be a peacemaker, and every Christian is to expect opposition. That's a rather depressing introduction from a human point of view, but stay tuned.

We will hear some good news in our text before we work through the whole lesson. First, though, we have to get through some sobering words from Jesus, and we'll do that starting right now.

Remember that we've been covering verses 3-12 using this outline. We've talked about blessed to find. We're in the middle of blessed to scribe, and then we'll finish up tonight with behavior demanded once we get past verse 11.

You might have the main idea of verses 3-12 memorized by now. That is that Jesus expects every believer to demonstrate all attributes of character and conduct described in these verses.

[3 : 40] Because Jesus exhibited these traits perfectly, we also can paraphrase the main idea as Jesus expects every believer to be like him. Let's go ahead and finish out our look at how Jesus described blessedness.

And he finished that out in verses 10-11 when he said, Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Yes, because Jesus expects every believer to exhibit all attributes of character and conduct described in these verses, Jesus expects true believers to also endure persecution.

Contrary to what you hear from the prosperity gospel proponents, particularly a smiling one based out of Houston, Texas, true believers will have their best life later.

Only unbelievers will have their best life now. That's one thing we need to remember as we go through these verses tonight. Only unbelievers will have their best life now. True believers will have their best life later.

[4 : 55] A second thing we need to remember is that blessing is only promised with a particular type of persecution. In verse 10, Jesus said that believers will be blessed when they endure persecution for righteousness' sake.

Two weeks ago, we covered the definition of righteousness in detail. Here's just a summary. True righteousness, as Jesus demands, includes a proper relationship with God, a proper relationship with other people, a pure heart, a pure mind, and pure motives.

True righteousness includes what we do, what we think, and our motives for what we do. Being righteous, as Jesus demands, means having a righteousness equal with God's.

Because Jesus is God, being righteous means having a righteousness equal with Jesus' righteousness. And that's why verse 11 sets the same standard as verse 10.

In verse 11, Jesus said, Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. We will all be blessed when we exhibit the same righteousness as Jesus does.

[6 : 09] That means we will be blessed when people persecute us because of Jesus. We will be blessed when we are persecuted because we exhibit Jesus' characteristics.

And we will be blessed when we live out the characteristics shown in the previous Beatitudes and the one we're studying tonight. Jesus' opening thrust in the Sermon on the Mount climaxes with this great and sobering truth.

And that truth is that those who faithfully live according to the first seven Beatitudes are guaranteed at some point to experience the eighth. Those who live righteously will inevitably be persecuted for it.

Godliness generates hostility and antagonism from the world. The crowning feature of the happy person is persecution. Kingdom people are rejected people.

Holy people are singularly blessed, but they pay a price for it. The last Beatitude is really two in one. It's a single Beatitude that's repeated and expanded.

[7 : 15] Blessed is mentioned twice, once in verse 10 and once in verse 11. But only one characteristic is given, and that characteristic is persecution. It actually is mentioned three times in those verses.

Only one result or reward is given in this section too, and that is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed apparently is repeated to emphasize the generous blessing given by God to those who are persecuted.

Double blessed because they are persecuted is what Jesus seems to be saying. Always remember what we touched on before we reviewed the definition of righteousness.

Blessing through persecution is promised only when we are exhibiting righteousness, or only when we're acting like Jesus. So let's explore that a little bit more with one example.

This is a little bit hard to believe, but suppose Willard teases Yolanda. I know everybody has a hard time imagining that, but just pretend along with me for example purposes tonight.

[8 : 19] Perhaps Yolanda is having a bad day, or perhaps the cumulative effects of previous comments, rare as they may be, finally push her over the edge. So Yolanda gets up and she punches Willard in the nose.

So if Yolanda gets up and punches Willard in the nose, Willard would be wrong to claim that he'll be blessed because Yolanda is persecuting.

Willard failed to act like Jesus when he made the comment that started the incident, so Willard has to bear some blame for that. Let's carry that example a little bit further though.

Suppose Willard gets upset by the punch, and so he has Tom kill his contacts at the police department, and Yolanda gets arrested for assault. Yolanda also would be wrong to expect that she will be blessed, even though jail could be considered a type of persecution.

She simply would be suffering the consequences of acting contrary to Jesus' requirement. That's why we always need to remember that the type of blessing Jesus promises in these verses only happens when we're persecuted for righteousness' sake, and that's another way of saying that we will be blessed when we are persecuted on account of Jesus.

[9 : 38] The idea that believers will be persecuted is a common theme in the Bible. One article listed 60 verses dealing with persecution, most of those in the New Testament.

We also have a few Old Testament examples of how believers were persecuted, so it's common throughout the Bible. Just think about some of these New Testament examples.

We have Moses, Daniel, Jeremiah, and the other prophets who were all persecuted at one time or another for what they believed. Listen to some verses that remind us how believers will be persecuted.

These first verses are Hebrews 11, verses 24 through 26. The writer of Hebrews says, By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. These verses have two examples of how Moses was persecuted for righteousness' sake.

[10 : 49] He chose to be mistreated with the people of God, and he considered the reproach of Christ to be greater than the wealth and treasures of Egypt. Moses was really looking forward to a future reward, and that's why he was able to do that.

Even in the Old Testament time before Jesus spoke the beatitude, Moses already knew that being persecuted for righteousness' sake would result in a reward. And we'll come back to that thought in a minute.

But for now, listen to some other verses that deal with persecution. Here's what Jesus told his disciples in John chapter 15, verses 18 through 21.

Again, these are John chapter 15, verses 18 through 21. If the world hates 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, therefore the world hates you.

[11 : 54] Remember the word that I said to you, A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.

But all these things they will do to you on my account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 12.10, We have a few more.

Here's Galatians 4.29, Listen now to Philippians 1, verse 29.

These next verses are 1 Thessalonians 3, verses 3 and 4.

Paul wrote, That no one be moved by these afflictions, for you yourselves know that we are destined for this. For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know.

[13 : 27] These are enough verses for now to see how the Bible speaks in many places about the persecution of believers. We'll look at some more verses about persecution a little later.

Listen to how John MacArthur summarized the significance of being persecuted for righteousness' sake. He said, Persecution is one of the surest and most tangible evidences of salvation.

Persecution is certain evidence of faithful Christian living. If we never experience ridicule, criticism, or rejection because of our faith, we have reason to examine the genuineness of it.

Persecution for Christ's sake is a sign of our own salvation, just as it is a sign of damnation for those who do the persecuting. Did you hear the positive news in that quote?

Persecution is one of the surest and most tangible evidences of salvation. Listen again to Matthew 5.10, where Jesus said, Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[14 : 36] The reward there, of course, is the kingdom of heaven. You may remember we've seen that reward before. In Matthew 5.3, Jesus pronounced the first beatitude, and he said, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

We just looked at verse 10 with the focus on persecution. We'll swing through the verse one more time, and this time we'll focus on the reward. We covered the meaning of the kingdom of heaven four weeks ago, so we'll only hit the highlights of that meaning tonight.

The kingdom promised involves the messianic rule of our Lord Jesus Christ. The blessed ones are not addressed as subject of the kingdom, but as fellow rulers with Christ.

Scripture repeatedly speaks of the high position of those who gain this kingdom. John Butler says, The reward is a present reward, a permanent reward, a pure reward, and a prestigious reward.

Some want to make this future tense, but it is present, and we used this example the last time. When a new car is purchased, it may be at the dealers getting prepared for you to pick it up in a few hours or a few days, but it is still your car now.

[15 : 55] God is preparing the kingdom for its coming, but that does not alter the fact that it now belongs to true believers. So think about this reward along with the other rewards in the Beatitudes.

God gives the true believers the kingdom of heaven, the comfort of heaven, the earth as their inheritance, the satisfaction of God's provision, the mercy and vision of God, the right to be called his sons and daughters, and the greatest of all rewards, a place in his kingdom.

Earlier we looked at other places in the Bible where persecution is mentioned, so let's consider a few other places in the Bible where persecution is followed by reward.

We already touched on one of these already, and that was Hebrews 11, 26. We read it before, but here it is again. Talking about Moses, the writer said, He considered the report of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.

Listen now to Mark chapter 10, verses 29 and 30. Jesus said, Truly I say to you, There is no one who has left house, or brothers, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers, and sisters and mothers, and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come, eternal life.

[17 : 31] Jesus said in Revelation chapter 2, verses 9 and 10 to the church at Smyrna, I know your tribulation and your poverty, but you are rich, and the slanderer of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation.

Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. And here are a few verses from Paul's letters. Romans 8, verses 16 through 18 say, The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him, in order that we may also be glorified with him, for I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Here are 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verses 17 and 18. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen.

For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. Going back to our lesson text, persecution comes up again in verse 11, along with some specific types of persecution.

[19 : 17] Verse 11 says, Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you, and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. In addition to the general persecution, Jesus mentions that unbelievers will revile Christians and speak evil about them because of Jesus.

Notice that Jesus also changes pronouns here. We and the original hearers might have been able to rationalize that the persecution in verse 10 could refer to somebody else.

Jesus started verse 10 with the familiar, Blessed are those. Verse 11 makes it impossible to rationalize that perhaps Jesus is saying that we will be excluded from persecution.

He starts verse 11 with, Blessed are you. Some people tried to apply verse 11 specifically to pastors and ministers because Jesus' disciples were the targets of the original you there.

Certainly, God's ministers throughout history have been targets of intense persecution. We have a few examples. Moses was reviled again and again.

[20 : 28] Samuel was rejected. Elijah was despised and persecuted. Micaiah was hated. Nehemiah was oppressed and defamed.

Jesus himself, the faithful witness of God, was put to death by the people to whom he ministered. Stephen was stoned. Peter and John were cast into prison.

James was beheaded. James was beheaded. And the entire ministry of Paul was one long series of bitter and relentless persecutions. We likely will be making a mistake, though, if we assume that verse 11 applies only to ministers, as in vocational or bivocational ministers.

Ephesians chapter 4, verses 11 through 13, make it clear that God's ministry roles exist to train all believers for ministry. Listen to what Paul wrote in Ephesians chapter 4, verses 11 through 13.

Paul said, Our human nature, understandably, would like to convince ourselves that Jesus is saying that persecution, only applies to some special class of believers.

[22 : 01] The Bible is clear that all believers can expect persecution. Remember the main idea. Jesus expects every believer to demonstrate all attributes of character and conduct described in these verses.

Jesus expects every believer to be like him. Because verse 11 applies to us all, let's dig a little deeper into it. Jesus mentions types of persecution that may not lead to death, although they could. Jesus says that believers will be reviled, and that unbelievers will utter all kinds of evil about them falsely. To be reviled is to suffer personal abuse.

To have all kinds of evil uttered against us is to suffer defamation of character. The blessing promised in verse 11 has a significant limitation.

We already touched on that limitation. Jesus only promises blessing to those who are reviled because of their association with Jesus. Similarly, the ones who will receive blessings are those because they are defamed because of Jesus, and because of their association with him.

[23 : 14] The righteous are persecuted because they are different. That is why the Pharisees and the scribes hated Jesus. Our Lord wasn't persecuted because he was good.

The Pharisees persecuted Jesus because he was different. There was something about him that condemned them, not the least of which was his words. The effect of Jesus Christ upon his contemporaries was that they threw stones at him, they hated him, and finally they chose a murderer instead of him and put him to death.

What then makes Christians different? You know this answer already as we've gone through this. To be a Christian ultimately is to be like Christ, and we can never be like Christ without being entirely changed.

We must get rid of the old nature that hates Christ and hates righteousness. We need a new nature that will love these things and love him and become like him. If you try to imitate Christ, the world will praise you, but if you become Christ-like, it will hate you.

And we'll come back to that and explain that quote in more detail as we get to the end. In the meantime, we need to cover one final section on the outline for verses 3 through 12.

[24 : 33] We've seen blessed defined, and over the last several weeks, we've seen blessed described. In verse 12, we see the behavior demanded. The behavior demanded.

And this behavior is demanded despite the persecution. Verse 12 is where Jesus said, Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.

For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Jesus demands that we rejoice and be glad when we're persecuted for his sake. That last part is very important.

We never should rejoice and be glad only for the sake of persecution itself. We only should rejoice and be glad when that persecution is because of Jesus.

Here's how Martin Lloyd-Jones described it. Persecution is something that the Christian should always regret. It should be to him a source of great grief that men and women, because of sin, and because they are so dominated by Satan, should behave in such an inhuman and devilish manner.

[25 : 44] The Christian is, in a sense, one who must feel his heart breaking at the effect of sin in others that makes them do this, so he never rejoices in the fact of persecution.

That's an interesting thought, isn't it? That even when we're persecuted, our hearts should be breaking for those who are during the persecution, because we know what fate awaits them unless they repent and become Christians themselves.

So let's talk about, then, why Jesus says that we should rejoice in persecution and be exceedingly glad because of that. And we actually have the answers there.

We have six reasons why we should rejoice and be glad. The first is that this persecution which the Christian is receiving is proof to the Christian of who he is and what he is.

So this persecution is proof to the Christian of who he is and what he is. If you find that you're being persecuted and maligned for Christ's sake, you know you're like the prophets who were God's chosen servants and who are now with God rejoicing in glory.

[26 : 50] That's something that we can rejoice about, too. That's one of the ways in which our Lord turns everything into a victory. In a sense, God makes even the devil a cause for blessing.

The devil, through his agencies, persecutes the Christian and makes him unhappy. But if you look at it the right way, you'll find a cause for rejoicing and will turn to Satan and say, Thank you, you're giving me proof that I am a child of God.

Otherwise, I never would be persecuted like this for Christ's sake. That's an interesting way to look at it, isn't it? If we're thus being falsely maligned and persecuted for Christ's sake, it must mean that our lives have become like Christ because we are being treated like the Lord was treated.

A second reason why Christians can rejoice when we're being persecuted for the sake of Christ is that God sometimes uses persecution and suffering to purify believers.

Peter is a prime example of this. He knew this. He knew it personally because he lived it, and then he saw it in the lives of his subsequent converts. Think about how Peter denied knowing Christ three times.

[28 : 08] But Jesus restored him, and after his restoration, Peter knew the joy of suffering for Christ. Go ahead and flip over to Acts chapter 5. We're going to spend a little bit of time in Acts chapter 5.

We'll look first at Acts chapter 5, verses 17 through 21. So Acts chapter 5, verses 17 through 21. They say, But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him, that is, the party of the Sadducees, and filled with jealousy, they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. But during the night, an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out and said, Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.

And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. Drop down now to verses 25 through 29. Picking up Acts chapter 5 and verse 25, it says, And someone came and told them, Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.

[29 : 22] Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council, and the high priest questioned them, saying, We strictly charge you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

But Peter and the apostles answered, We must obey God rather than men. Now drop down to Acts chapter 5, verses 40 through 42.

Acts 5, 40 through 42 say, And when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go.

Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

The apostles then became living examples of Matthew chapter 5, verse 12. Listen to what Peter later wrote in 1 Peter chapter 1, verses 6 through 8.

[30 : 40] Again, these verses are 1 Peter chapter 1, verses 6 through 8. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.

For the Christian, persecution and also suffering in general is the crucible in which God, the refiner, purifies us. Peter knew that because Peter lived that.

The third truth that will help a Christian to rejoice in persecution is the truth that persecution allows the Christian the opportunity to show the supernatural difference of the Christian life.

Persecution gives the Christian the opportunity to show the supernatural difference of the Christian life. If everything is going well with you and you rejoice, that makes you no different from the non-believers of this world.

[32 : 04] They also rejoice when circumstances are favorable. If you're able to rejoice when things are unfavorable, though, Jesus Christ is seen clearly in you and the supernatural power of the Christian faith is made manifest to all those around you.

The fourth reason why true believers can rejoice in suffering is the promise of rewards. And the thought of doing something for a reward makes many Christians uncomfortable.

That's likely because they have a wrong view of what the rewards are. Christians who get uncomfortable thinking about the rewards often are thinking only of material or self-exalting things.

Actually, the rewards are far more likely to be spiritual, things like fellowship with Christ and proximity to Christ, and they cannot be the least bit self-exalting, and that's because even the rewards flow from God's grace.

And of course, we know that Jesus himself said that our reward is great in heaven when we're persecuted on his account. The concept of being rewarded after being persecuted for Christ's sake is a concept that is illustrated throughout the Bible.

[33 : 20] We saw that in the verses in 1 Peter that we read earlier, but if that failed to convince you, consider that Jesus himself endured persecution for a future reward.

Listen to Hebrews 12, verses 1 and 2. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Matthew 5.12 gives us at least one more reason why we can rejoice when we are being persecuted for righteousness' sake. That is reason number five.

Being persecuted because of our association with Christ also gives us proof of where we're going. Jesus said that our reward is great in heaven. Our reward may be little to nothing on earth, but our reward is great in heaven, and the only way to get a heavenly reward is to go to heaven someday. So that's five verses that come from tonight's text itself. I told you there were six reasons, so let's throw in that sixth reason. That comes from other places in Scripture, and that sixth reason is that the Christian can rejoice in the knowledge that the Lord Jesus Christ is particularly near him in the moment of severe persecution.

[35 : 02] The Christian can rejoice in the knowledge that the Lord Jesus Christ himself is particularly near him in the moment of severe persecution. Think about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

They were thrown into the fiery furnace for refusing to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar. And Daniel 3, chapters 23 through 25, tell us what happened.

Starting in Daniel 3, chapter, or verse 23, it says, And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, Did we not cast three men bound into the fire? They answered and said to the king, True, O king. He answered and said, But I see four men unbound walking in the midst of the fire and they are not hurt and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.

[36 : 04] The prophet Daniel himself was another person who experienced God drawing near to him during severe persecution. You remember the story of Daniel in the lion's den.

After King Darius was duped into making praying punishable by death, Daniel continued to pray to God. The other advisors who wanted Daniel dead forced the king to enforce his ruling.

The king spent a sleepless night after Daniel was thrown into the lion's den and let's pick up what happens in Daniel chapter 6 verses 19 through 22. Then at break of day the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions.

As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you serve continually been able to deliver you from the lions?

Then Daniel said to the king, O king, live forever. My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths and they have not harmed me because I was found blameless before him and also before you, O king, I have done no harm.

[37 : 16] When a Christian can anchor himself in a knowledge of the reasons we just covered, that's why persecution can result in rejoicing and the rejoicing will lead to greater knowledge.

Let's go back to Peter's letter for a summary of how believers should view suffering for the sake of Christ. 1 Peter chapter 4 verses 12 through 16 say, Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you.

But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rest upon you.

But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

Peter's words sound a lot like what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 5 verses 10 through 12. As we conclude our study of the Beatitudes in this section of the Sermon on the Mount, think back to how the Beatitudes demonstrate what we learned in the very first lesson on the Sermon on the Mount.

[38 : 42] We discussed how the sermon demonstrates that the new birth is essential to obtain true blessings. Earlier in tonight's lesson, I used this quote, To be Christian ultimately is to be like Christ and no one can be like Christ without being entirely changed.

We must get rid of the old nature that hates Christ and hates righteousness. We need a new nature that will love these things and love Him and thus become like Him. If you try to imitate Christ, the world will praise you.

If you become Christ-like, it will hate you. In other words, the world is fine with us imitating Christ if we never take that imitation too far.

However, when we truly become Christ-like, we will begin to experience persecution, especially when we say things like the Bible is entirely true and Jesus is the only way.

Our idea of what we call the perfect Christian nearly always is that He is nice, popular, and He never offends anybody and He's easy to get along with.

[39 : 52] But the real Christian is not praised by everybody. Jesus said in Luke 6, verse 26, Woe to you when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

So the question we have to ask ourselves is, do we want to be identified with the false prophets or do we want to be identified with Jesus? If we want to be identified with the false prophets, that gives us an easy road now, but a cursed eternity.

Sam Storms put it this way, he said, If you wish to avoid persecution in the world, here's what you must do. Mimic the world's standards. Never criticize its values.

Keep quiet at the gospel. Laugh at its sordid humor. Smile and keep silent when God's name is mocked and reviled. And be ashamed of Jesus Christ.

If we strive to be identified with Jesus, we'll get a difficult road sometimes in this life, but a blessed road in eternity. Hear Jesus' own words one more time.

[41 : 05] Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. let's pray. Father, we thank you for the reminder that when we identify ourselves with you, we will face persecution at times in this world.

When that persecution comes, give us the strength and the will to endure it and help us realize that we will be rewarded in heaven because of that. Continue to be with us and strengthen us and make us more like you every day.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.