

BLESSED ARE THE PERSECUTED

Matthew 5.3-12

3 *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. 6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. 7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. 8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. 10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

INTRODUCTION

- Would we want Jesus running a marketing campaign for our church?

JESUS DOES NOT BLESS THE PERSECUTED IN GENERAL

1. Jesus is not talking about those who are persecuted for unrighteousness or foolishness.
2. Jesus is talking about those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.

JESUS DOES NOT TELL US TO PURSUE PERSECUTION

1. Jesus says those who pursue righteousness will be persecuted. (If you are not being persecuted you must ask yourself why not.)
2. The implied command is to endure persecution when it comes.

JESUS DOES NOT TELL US TO ENJOY PERSECUTION

1. “Rejoice and be glad” does not mean we must enjoy persecution. In fact, Peter says “rejoice though grieved” (1 Peter 1.6).
2. We rejoice in our persecution because we know our reward is great in heaven.
3. Our promised reward is the kingdom of heaven.
 - a. The kingdom of heaven is at the heart of the gospel.
 - b. The kingdom of heaven refers to God’s will being done on earth as it is in heaven.
 - c. How can we know God will make good on his promise? (Romans 8.32)

CONCLUSION

- Those of us who have already folded under persecution must remember Peter.
- And like Peter, we must meditate on mercy of God in Christ so that we will be able to stand firm in faith and receive the kingdom of God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(These questions will be used in our small groups this evening. If you are interested in attending one of them, please let Pastor Caines know after the service.)

1. If you were designing a marketing campaign for the church, what would you want to emphasize and why? Where do you think Jesus' promise of persecution should fit in?
2. Jesus does not bless persecution in general, but persecution for righteousness sake.
 - a. Describe a time when you were persecuted for unrighteousness.
 - b. Describe a time when you were persecuted for righteousness.
 - c. Were you able to see the true cause of the persecution when you were in the midst of it?
 - d. How can we learn to discern the true cause of persecution more accurately?
3. Jesus' blessing on persecution does not imply a command to seek out persecution, but to endure it.
 - a. How do you tend to respond when you are persecuted for righteousness sake?
 - b. How is Peter's story an encouragement to those of us who have folded under persecution in the past?
 - c. How can we train ourselves to endure persecution more faithfully?
4. Peter says "rejoice though grieved" (1 Peter 1.6). What do we learn from this verse?
5. What reason does Jesus give for rejoicing in persecution? Are you comfortable with the idea of seeking reward? Why or why not?
6. C. S. Lewis says our passions are not too strong, but too weak; we are far too easily satisfied. What does he mean by this? Do you agree?
7. The reward Jesus promises is the kingdom of heaven.
 - a. What is the kingdom of heaven?
 - b. Does the kingdom of heaven motivate you to endure persecution?
 - c. What rewards do you tend to think about or hope for most often?
8. What one thing from this sermon do you most want to remember and apply to your life?
9. How can we be praying this text for ourselves and one another? How else can we be praying?