

THE FINAL BEATITUDE

Matthew 5:10-12

Intro: We come tonight to the last of the Beatitudes that the Lord gave in His Sermon on the Mount. Some expositors treat them separately because of the repetition of the word, “Blessed.” But I side with those who treat verses 10, 11 and 12 as one Beatitude. Actually we could make the point that we have three Beatitudes here because the word “rejoice” is really a synonym for “blessed” because they both speak of that which brings happiness to people. In addition, some form of the verb *persecute* is used in each of these three verses. (Point them out.) So these factors seem to me to tie these three verses together.

And yet I think that we all are surprised to see that the previous seven Beatitudes are linked with a result that is so different from that which is described in the first seven. Without giving the first seven a lot of thought, we would think that such characteristics would have the approval of all people generally. But obviously that is not the case as the Bible clearly indicates, and as most of us have learned from our experience in the world and with the world.

Let us remind ourselves as to what was our Lord’s purpose in giving these Beatitudes to His disciples. I think there were two. In the first place He was describing the character of God. And secondly, He was describing the child of God. They describe the character of God as He is, always has been, and always will be. But with us, who know the Lord, He was describing what we are becoming. God’s purpose in our salvation is to make us like the Lord Jesus Christ. But that is being done gradually, throughout the years of our lives, and will not be completed until the Lord comes or until He takes us to heaven at death. We would agree that if everybody in our church were like this, or becoming like this, it would be more of a delight for us to be together than it is even now.

But will the world ever be like this? Yes, in the new heaven and the new earth, but not now. The truth is that the world doesn’t want to be like this. And the proof of that is to be seen in the way the Lord Jesus was treated when He was here on earth. And we see it even in the way, to refer to the end of verse twelve, that the prophets of God, OT and NT, were treated by the world as we learn from Biblical history. The world does not prize humility, or repentance for sin, or meekness, or righteousness, or mercy, or purity of heart, or even peacemaking. You see, we all

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have been born in sin, and people are content to stay that way unless and until the Lord shows them a far better way. The Lord Jesus Christ has never won “a man of the year” award. And even here in our beloved country we are seeing more and more opposition to God and Christ, and the Bible, and to Christians and what we stand for. Persecution of Christ and of the people who love God and Christ, is apparent from Genesis to Revelation in your Bible and in mine. But in spite of the persecution, God lives, and so does Christ, and so does the Bible which has been given to us by God. The nation Israel still exists, and the Lord Jesus said about the Church, that the gates of hades shall not prevail against it.

Now I noticed something this week in reading over the Beatitudes that I had not noticed before. In all of the Beatitudes down to and including verse 10, the Lord was speaking about the people of God generally in the third person. And the latter part of each Beatitude is a promise. For example,

In verse 3, “for their’s is the kingdom of heaven.

In verse 4, “for they shall be comforted.”

In verse 5, “for they shall inherit the earth.”

In verse 6, “for they shall be filled.”

In verse 7, “for they shall obtain mercy.”

In verse 8, “for they shall see God.”

In verse 9, “for they shall be called the children of God.

In verse 10, “for their’s is the kingdom of heaven.”

But then notice the difference in verses 11 and 12. It is no longer **they**, but **you!**

In verse 11, “Blessed are **ye**, when men shall revile **you**, and persecute **you**, and shall say all manner of evil against **you** falsely for My sake.

In verse 12, “Rejoice (**ye**, understood), and be exceeding glad: for great is **your** reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before **you**.” Why did the Lord make this change? Because He wanted the application of the Beatitudes to our own lives to be as personal as they could possibly be. But we must not be under any illusion about them. This is not what the world is looking for.

So let us begin by looking at verse 10, the first verse of our text, which fits the pattern of all of the Beatitudes that have gone before.

The Lord Jesus was saying in v. 3 that those who were poor in spirit, were happy, were blessed by the Lord. Notice the same in v. 4, and then in v.

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5, and then in verse 6, and then in verse 7, and then in verse 8, and then in verse 9 – but with the change in verse 10, although this was not what the people of God seek, as in verses 3 through 9, yet there is no change in the word that makes it a Beatitude. Persecution is the reward that the world and the Devil give for righteousness. The people of God have often lost everything in the way of possessions, and possibly health, and even life. But there are two things that the world and the Devil cannot take away from them: their joy in the Lord (“Blessed”), and heaven itself. Those who have gone before us give us abundant evidence that verses 11 and 12 will be true for us too.

But what have the saints been persecuted for throughout the history of Israel, and now through the history of the Church? It is because of “righteousness,” both imputed and imparted. The first is the claim to be justified before God, and the second is the evidence of justification that can be seen in the way the people of God live. God’s standards and the world’s standards are as different as light and darkness, as day and night. Our Lord said, “Men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil” (John 3:19). They don’t want the light, and we didn’t either until the Lord showed us the light and drew us into the light of the Gospel.

And what is the object of persecution? It is to do away with the Gospel. The Jews thought that they could do away with the Gospel by doing away with Christ. But the result was exactly the opposite. The death of Christ sealed the Gospel message forever, giving it, its power. This is what the Lord meant when He said that “the gates of hades, death, the grave, could not prevail against the Church and its message.

Do you remember the Lord’s denunciation of the Jews when He lamented over Jerusalem, saying, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate” (Matt. 23:37-38). You will find the same words in Luke 13:34-35. The prophets of the OT and the apostles and prophets of the NT, received the same treatment, and it was all an attempt to do away with the Gospel, and the righteousness that is proclaimed in the Gospel.

When a person is first saved, and has experienced the joy of having his or her sins forgiven, and then tries to tell others about the Lord expecting the

same joyous response, the result is often shocking. A righteous person is righteous because of the work of Christ in his heart. He is happy because he is forgiven and fully accepted by God. This often causes trouble between a man and his wife, if one is righteous and the other is not. It often causes trouble between parents and children. It often breaks up a long-standing friendship. Sometimes it causes trouble on a job, the Christian may be passed over instead of being promoted. Often these broken relationships are restored when the unsaved person is drawn to Christ. But persecution often takes shape like these. At other times it can be more severe. But for a true Christian this makes heaven all the dearer, and anticipated with greater joy.

But now let us look at the words which the Lord used in verse 11. The “blessed” is still there, but what follows is very, very different.

What does it mean that people “revile you”? This is what the crowds did to the Lord Jesus when they ridiculed Him as He was hanging on the Cross. “He saved others, Himself He could not save. Matthew 27:44 uses this same word, revile, about how the thieves on the Cross reviled the Lord. This is what the Apostle Peter was talking about when in 1 Peter 4:14 he wrote,

14 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.

I think we all understand what it means to be persecuted, but does the word that the Lord used cast further light upon what Christians suffer in the world? Persecution not only means to say bad things, and to do bad things, but it means to pursue a person like the people did during Absalom’s revolt against his father King David. Remember how Shimei pursued David and cast stones at him. This is an illustration of a more aggressive persecution.

Then the Lord added, “and shall say all manner of evil against you.” The tongue is one of the worst instruments of persecution. Charges are leveled at the accused which he is not given time to answer. And if he does, it only leads to greater ridicule. As the Apostle James said, the tongue is set on fire of hell.

But the Lord Jesus added the word, “falsely.” Among all of the charges

that were aimed at the Lord Jesus, they were all false; none was true. We are to be careful that we do not respond in kind to those who lay charges against us. And we must live in such a way that our enemies look in vain for something to criticize us. I heard of a pastor who had a woman in his congregation who criticized him for the ties that he wore,. His response to her was, “My dear sister, if that is all that you can find to criticize about me, I am very thankful.” “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (Prov. 15:1).

And then the Lord added, “For my sake.” It is reported of Peter and the apostles that they were beaten and sent away having been told that they were to speak no more in the name of Jesus. And we read in Acts 5:41 what their response was:

41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

In Luke’s brief account of some of the Beatitudes, he quoted the Lord as saying in Luke 6:22-23

22 Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake.

23 Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.

And this is practically the same which we read in Matthew’s account.

Now in addition to being thankful and rejoicing because we suffer shame for our Lord’s Name, what other reasons do we have to “rejoice, and be exceeding glad”? Two reasons:

1) “For great is your reward in heaven.” We probably don’t talk as much as we should about rewards in heaven. But the Lord promised “great . . . rewards.” Some of them are to be in the form of crowns, as we read in Revelation 4:10-11,

10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

So, if for no other reasons we should want rewards so that we can cast

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them at the Lord's feet. Even just for loving the appearance, the coming of the Lord, we are promised along with the Apostle Paul, a crown. See 2 Timothy 4:6-8:

6 For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

But as far as the present is concerned, on what basis can we rejoice. No one really wants to suffer persecution, or to suffer at all. Sometimes it is called a trial of our faith. Let me give you two answers:

1) It is through trials and testings that we grow in the Lord. It is through testings that we realize our weaknesses. It is through our trials that our faith is strengthened. It has been rightly said that an untried faith is a weak faith.

2) Trials prepare us for the coming of the Lord, and for heaven.

On the first point let me give you Paul's reaction to the thorn in the flesh which was given to him, as he said, "Lest I should be exalted above measure." And then he continued in 2 Corinthians 12:8-10:

8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

He also wrote to the church at Rome along the same line. This is what we read in Romans 5:1-5:

1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also:

knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

2) On the second point, trials prepare us for the coming of the Lord, see 1 Peter 1:3-9:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:

9 Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.

By nature we are all earth bound. God wants us to be looking forward to heaven and to being with Him. Trials and testings are what He uses to keep our hopes set on being with Him. Whatever our trials may be, we would like to be without them. But when we learn that the Lord is doing a work in our hearts through the trials which cannot be accomplished in any other way, by God's grace, let us glory in tribulations also.