



-- **Video Clip – Persecution in China**

- The clandestine nature of Brad's Mission trip to China
- Olympics in China
- Read Luke 6:20-26
- Pray

-- Working at the deli – Ann from the Cavalryman

- "I have a tall order, and I want it now!"
- We felt both inspired ("We're in the money!") and challenged ("How on earth are we going to do this?!")

When I read through these Beatitudes, in verses 20-23, and their concomitant woes, in verses 23-26, I sort of feel that same way, for, to me, these verses are as inspiring as any portion of Scripture. They inspire purpose and reverent awe with their beautiful depiction of the redeemed, and they imbue matchless joy with their revelation of the abundant blessings Christ promises to everyone who lives according to them. Yet, at the same time, these verses are as spiritually challenging as anything we see anywhere in Scripture, for they powerfully set forth the radically counter-cultural call of Christ. Indeed, they are especially challenging when we remember that what Jesus presents here, in this outstanding introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, is nothing less than the portrait of every true believer. This is the picture of a genuine Christian, and it is not most definitely a humanly impossible portrait that can only be painted by the divine artistry of the Holy Spirit at work within true believers.

Nonetheless, the person Christ describes here really is the only person who will be happy and blessed in the end. What Jesus is setting forth in these four bold statements are the four attitudes essential to saving faith in Christ. In other words, unless we come to Jesus Christ in the way He describes here, we can never really come at all.

Of these four attitudes, we have already examined the first three. The first attitude, you will recall, is spiritual poverty. The redeemed in Christ are people who understand their personal spiritual bankruptcy and know that their own individual righteousness has no power whatsoever to purchase their pardon from sin. Thus, if we would enter the kingdom of God, we must understand that we have nothing to offer God except our desperate need. Therefore, we cry out to Him in our poverty and receive a salvation that only He can give.

Second, the blessed are people who hunger and thirst for the righteousness that we lack, desiring it in our spirits as intensely as the body craves food and drink.

Third, the redeemed are those who mourn. That is, we are completely broken over our own sin and cry out in the world's only Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave His life as a ransom for our sins. Thus, if we are in Christ, we ought to see evidence of these attitudes in our lives. Not only so, but we ought to be progressing and growing in them throughout our Christian lives, until that great day when we finally pass from this life and enter into the sublime fullness of these godly characteristics.

These are the first three attitudes required to receive God's blessing—spiritual poverty, hunger for righteousness, and sorrow over sin. And wherever these three Beatitudes are present together, we will discover that the fourth Beatitude, found in Luke 6:22-23, will inevitably be present as well. Jesus declares, *“Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.”*

Again, as we read this Beatitude, our senses are just as surely shocked as they were upon considering the first three. Blessed are the hated?! Blessed are the insulted and rejected?! What on earth is going on here?

What Christ is saying here is that persecution is the world's inevitable response to authentic Christian living. In other words, wherever genuine spiritual poverty meets together with both an ardent hunger for righteousness and a sincere sorrow over sin, there will be persecution as well. When we are lifted by God out of the wrath of the world into the glorious fullness of Christian character... and when we begin living as God intends... and when we begin fulfilling the principles and purposes that God has ordained for His people... we are, by those very attitudes, destined to encounter hatred, insult, and rejection. Why? Because the darkness

simply cannot tolerate the light. Whenever we, as God's people, behave as God's people should, we will, to one extent or another, suffer persecution from the God-hating, Christ-rejecting, Satan-controlled world around us.

You see, what Christ is telling us here, and what His own life has proved, is that the world will invariably react negatively to anyone who positively identifies with the Beatitudes, for the virtues they describe are intolerable to an evil world. The self-importance of human pride simply cannot stand the idea of someone who is truly poor in spirit. The self-sufficiency of human desire finds a hunger for God's ways intolerable. The self-aggrandizement of human pleasure loathes the thought of mourning over sinfulness. Apart from Christ, the human heart wants to sidestep sin altogether and continue to convince itself that it is alright and it can make it on its own. As these characteristics take root in us, our lives will flagrantly cut against the grain of the world. That is the fate in store for all who would live out the Beatitudes.

Therefore, one of the surest signs that we are among the blessed will come in the form of derision and rejection from the world. Perhaps, as you hear me say that, you do not like the sound of it. Perhaps you feel that I am mistaken and that this Beatitude really means something quite different. Perhaps you need more proof. Listen, then, to the overwhelming testimony of the New Testament.

- John 16:33 – *“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*
- John 15:18-19 – *“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.”*
- Galatians 4:29 – *And we who are born of the Holy Spirit are persecuted by those who want us to keep the law, just as Isaac, the child of promise, was persecuted by Ishmael, the son of the slave-wife.*
- Philippians 1:27-29 – *...Stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.*
- 1 Thessalonians 3:2-4 – *We sent Timothy...to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know.*

-- 2 Timothy 3:12 – *Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

Take note, at this point, that there is no reward for those who suffer because they have done evil. 1 Peter 2:20 says, “*How is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.*” In this same verse, we both the curse of doing evil and the blessedness which Christ directs toward those who suffer for doing what is pleasing to God.

But the evidence from Scripture is undeniable, isn't it. Could it be any clearer that one of the surest signs of saving faith in Christ is rejection by the world? Those who lived as Christ lived and do as God commands will be excluded, insulted, and rejected. Think about it... There has never been, nor will there ever be, anyone more loving than our Lord, Jesus Christ. There was never a more perfect or profound Beatitude attitude than His. Many people responded to His sacrificial love and entered into His perfect peace. However, even though Jesus was the most humble, loving, gracious, kind, and peaceful person who has ever lived, He was still greeted with fierce antagonism wherever He traveled and was persecuted more outrageously and undeservedly than anyone before Him or forever after.

This same opposition meets everyone made righteous in Christ. If we would chart the course of God's children throughout history, we will quickly discover they have perpetually suffered on account of their pursuit of godliness. This promised progression began early in the book of Genesis, when a godly man named Abel was murdered by his ungodly brother, Cain, who simply could not tolerate his righteousness. It has been the same way ever since.

We see the same with Moses. In Hebrews 11:24-25, we read, “*By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.*” Moses elected to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than to compromise with Egypt. We read about the harassment King David suffered throughout the Psalms. The Old Testament prophets, such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel, routinely suffered greatly because they proclaimed God's message. Terrible persecution also followed Christ's Apostles, all of whom were martyred for their faith, except for John, who was exiled to the Island of Patmos.

This is how it has always been for the people of God. From the early Christians in the Roman Empire under Nero, who fed to the lions and illuminated his garden parties with their flaming bodies, to Christians all around the world today who are beaten, ridiculed, and rejected because of Christ, there is always a price to pay for authentic affiliation with Christ. Those who refuse to compromise about Christ will quickly find conflict in this fallen world.

The great Puritan writer, Thomas Watson once wrote, “Though they be ever so meek, merciful, pure in heart, their piety will never shield them from suffering. They must hang their harp on the willows and take up the cross. The way to Heaven is by way of thorns and blood. Set it down as a maxim: if you will follow Christ, you must see the swords and staves. Put the cross in your creed.”

In this tremendously challenging poem, Watson is really just echoing the chief lesson of our Beatitude for today. Taking his cue from the words of our Lord, he is telling us that God has ordained persecution to be a non-negotiable aspect of being a Christian; it was ordained that way. If we do not find ourselves cutting completely against the grain of the world at large, then there is something seriously wrong with our faith and witness. And this is true no matter where we live, for even in the most tolerant environment, in the most tolerant country, at the most tolerant time, the cross will never cease to be a symbol of contempt. It will never cease to inspire hostility, and in some cases hatred, false accusation, and even persecution and death.

These truths may be difficult for us to fathom. By God’s kindness, most of the brutal examples of persecution I have mentioned are quite foreign to our experience. Thankfully, Christians are simply not burned at the stake in this country, or anything like that. However, not all persecution is physical. Notice how Jesus describes the persecution that will inevitably come to God’s people in verse 22. He says, “*Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.*”

We may not lose our lives to persecution, but we may very well lose an important opportunity, or a promotion, or our jobs. We may not be imprisoned for our faith, but we may very well be ostracized by family, neighbors, or the community around us, because we live for Jesus Christ. We may not be placed in exile, but the people our neighborhoods may not talk to us anymore because we keep talking about Jesus and confronting them with sin. We may not be beaten with sticks, but we may very well find ourselves the victims of ruthless false

accusations and gossip. Indeed, there are myriads of ways in which true believers endure the reaction of the world.

I'm certainly not saying that every believer is constantly and intensely persecuted all the time. However, it is a simple truth of Scripture that the world is set against the things of God, and as we live them out, we will absolutely experience some measure of the reproach of Christ. If we sincerely endeavor to live in the likeness of Christ, then the world at large will set its face against us. All of us who really want to live righteously in the world, will, at some time or another, absolutely know the rebuke of the Cross.

Now, having said all that, let me add this: If we really want to avoid this blessed persecution, we can surely escape. It is quite possible—simple really—for us to live our whole lives through and never be persecuted at all. Here's how we do it. First of all, we need only ignore what the world does. Instead of condemning it as Christ did, we need only turn a blind eye. Or, better yet, if we really want to avoid rejection, we can go ahead and affirm the world's ways. If we will accept the world's morality and its standards and its ethics, and if we will live as it lives, then we will surely be saved from the world's hatred and exclusion.

Second, if we would evade persecution, then we should most definitely not tell people they are sinners. Don't confront them with the fact that they are lost without Christ, and don't inform them that they are condemned to eternal judgment at the hands of Holy God. And for goodness sake, never talk about hell! Third, don't preach or teach that Christ is the only way and that every other religious system is a lie. Let them believe that their so-called good deeds will take them straight to heaven.

And fourth, don't separate yourself from the abundant worldliness around you. Just go along with it. Laugh at its jokes, revel in its entertainment, and smile when it mocks God. Never let it bother you when the world takes God's name in vain or deceives people with its false teaching. In essence, I am certain that you and I can avoid persecution altogether if we will simply refuse to take a stand for Christ. If we will only be ashamed of our Savior before others, then we should be able to escape insults and rejection.

Yet, before you choose that route, please hear the warning of [Luke 9:26](#), where Jesus says, *“If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”* Ask yourself which is worse: being rejected by the world or

being rejected by its one and only Savior? Notice, according to Christ's words in this passage, if you are ashamed not just of Christ, but also of the words which He taught—that is the Bible—it may well be that He is ashamed of you. When you are popular with the world, then the world must not know the truth about you. You have either hidden your Christianity or you may not even be a Christian at all. Let us not forget the woe that comes just a few verses later in our passage from Luke 6. In Luke 6:26, Jesus says, *“Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.”*

Therefore, friends, this is where we find ourselves in God's Word this morning. If we're going to live out the Beatitude life to which Christ is calling us, then we simply must be ready for the inevitable reaction of the world. That is the way it has always been, that is how it will continue to be until Christ returns. We simply cannot live righteous lives in the face of an unrighteous society and expect to get through it without experiencing the reaction of the world. I've said it before and I'll say it again, if Satan is not bothering you, then you are probably not bothering him.

You know, sermons such as this one are one of the greatest blessings of preaching straight through Scripture, rather than picking and choosing passages, because I have a hunch that the vast majority of Christians have heard very few sermons about the central role of persecution in the life of God's people. At this point, I guess I am not sure how you feel about this message, but I do know this: the church of Jesus Christ needs more messages like this (not because I am preaching it).

We need to stop avoiding the difficult teachings of Scripture and only preaching the passages that we enjoy. God's Word is clear: If we want to be God's people then we must know that our Lord is calling us to a lifestyle that is completely contrary to the ways of the world. He is telling us that, while there is undoubtedly great reward, there is also a price to pay. It is this sort of biblical integrity and honesty that disperses illusions and reveals the true condition of our hearts.

And that thought brings us to our final point this morning. There is one extremely significant aspect of our passage today that we have not yet discussed. If you will notice, all of the three Beatitudes in Luke, as well as the previous seven Beatitudes in Matthews Gospel, are about inner attitudes of heart. Whereas most Jews followed an external religion works-based righteousness, Jesus was giving them an internal one. Thus, all of the Beatitudes describe internal attitudes, including this one.

As I mentioned in the introduction to this message, in Luke 6:20-23, Jesus reveals to us four attitudes that signify true belief in Christ. Hopefully, we all recall the first three—spiritual poverty, hunger for righteousness, and sorrow over sin. In our verses for today, the fourth essential attitude of redemption in Christ is revealed, and it is this: We must be willing to endure persecution.

You see, when we accept Christ Jesus as Savior, we simultaneously confess Him as Lord, and confessing Him as Lord requires a willingness to follow Him wherever He may lead, even if that path passes through the halls of hostility, insult, and rejection. It describes a boldness and trust in God that say, “I will do in this world what Christ wants me to do. I will be what He wants me to be. I will say what He wants me to say. And if persecution results, I will trust in Him to see me through it.” It is this attitude that Christ is calling blessed.

The happy are those who will give anything for Him who gave everything for us. There is always a price to pay when you live for Christ in this fallen world. However, please hear Christ’s promise as well. In Luke 6:23, Jesus says this about those who are willing to be persecuted for His sake, “*Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven.*” The fruit of Beatitude living is not a crown that will perish; it is not possessions that will be destroyed. No, Christ’s promise is a reward that will never spoil, perish, or fade, kept in heaven for us.

-- Application

What about us? Do we really know what it means to live life with such a desire for godliness that we encounter opposition from the world around us? And not because we are obnoxious or arrogant or demanding, and not because we are unmerciful, or annoying, or cruel—but because there is so much of Christ shining out through our lives and conversations?

Let me ask all of you here today: Are we willing to pay the price? // Are we willing to live the way God wants us to live and be living illustrations of these Beatitudes regardless of the cost? // Are we ready to bear the reproach of Jesus Christ? Are we willing to take up our crosses and follow Him? Are we willing to suffer worldly loss so that we might gain the very Kingdom of God? Are we willing to pay any price for the glory of God? This, I am certain, is what Jesus is asking of us, for Beatitude Christians are the kind of people whom God uses to change the world for His glory.

