

Lesson 8: The Sermon on the Mount Study The Blood Stained Path of the Kingdom

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 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. ¹² Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. Matthew 5:10-12

Introduction

A double blessing concludes the Beatitudes of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. Taking note of the pronouns He uses, as He instructs His disciples, He begins by speaking of the multitudes. Matthew 4:25 shares that the multitudes came from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judaea, and beyond Jordan, indicating a mixed group of Greeks, devout Jews, and Samaritans. Within this blessing was a clear warning. Following Jesus would cost them. They would suffer for Jesus's sake, but as the Beatitudes had begun, so they end in the same manner. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Though their backgrounds were diverse, they would be unified under the name of Jesus and gain His kingdom for all eternity.

Then, Jesus turns to His disciples with a more specific warning, instruction, and promise. They will suffer, and you will suffer more. Men will revile you, persecute you, speak evil of you falsely, but you can rejoice. There is a great reward laid up in Heaven, awaiting your arrival.

Persecution was nothing new to God's Kingdom. The disciples knew the Old Testament Scriptures and the history of the prophets. Speaking God's truth had always been a dangerous mission. Jesus did not preach a prosperity Gospel in His Sermon on the Mount. The prosperity would not be found on this side of Heaven, but eternal treasure would accrue for every intentional choice the disciples made to follow Jesus.

The first-century Christians did suffer. Not only did they suffer from the religious Jews who rejected Jesus, but there was political suffering, as well. Those who worked in construction would have been expected to build temples to false gods. A day's wages were often needed to feed their family day by day. Following Jesus would cost them their livelihood. Rome also demanded Caesar worship, which led many Christians to the Colosseum to die by lion or gladiator. Tradition says that Peter was hung upside down on top of a hill, while Paul, a Roman citizen, was more humanely executed by ax at the bottom of the same hill on the same day. Jesus did not promise a better life on this side of Heaven for those who followed Him. He promised persecution. And yet, joy and gladness would accompany those who walked this blood-stained path. What a different kind of Kingdom Jesus promised!

Study Questions

1. After reading Matthew 5:10-11, what specific kind of persecution is commended by Jesus?
2. There are many kinds of persecution. Some persecution is ethnic, some racial, some religious. Jesus commends persecution that is for righteousness's sake and for His sake. After looking up 1 Peter 2:11-25, note the instruction Peter gave to the first-century Christians. How were the believers to accept suffering for well-doing?

3. Jesus further defined how believers were to live both with the outside world and with other believers in Matthew 5:38-42. In verse 40, in particular, it was against Mosaic Law to take a man's outer garment overnight, because it was often used as a blanket for sleeping. (Exodus 2:26-27). What Jesus is saying, then, is that His followers will not even demand their rights under the law. How is this counter-cultural to the way most believers think today, especially Americans?
4. The instructions about "an eye for an eye" were from Mosaic Law, in which God was actually limiting the vengeance that could be taken on others who wronged them. Jesus takes it further, in that believers are not to take vengeance at all. Where did this kind of teaching lead Jesus?
5. William Barclay writes of the early believers in his commentary on Matthew, Volume 1, that the Lord's Supper was often misconstrued by unbelievers. Lies were spread that the followers of Jesus were sacrificing children and eating them because Jesus said to eat of His body and drink of His blood. The "love feasts," or communion table, was also mischaracterized as something evil. This led to horrendous persecution from Rome. Nero wrapped Christians in pitch and used them as torches. He sewed them into animal skins and let wild animals tear them to death. Many other kinds of torture were used throughout the centuries. How does this compare to the way Christians complain about persecution today?
6. In Acts 4:23-37, after Peter and John had been brought before the religious leaders who pressed for the crucifixion of Jesus, the believers rallied together to pray. What did they ask God for in verse 29, and how did God answer in verse 32?
7. From these verses, it is interesting that persecution brought the believers together in unity, compassion, and care for one another. In what ways is persecution for Jesus's sake a blessing to His followers both here and in Heaven?
8. On September 10, 2025, Charlie Kirk was shot and killed, most likely because of His witness for Jesus Christ. Many people cheered his death. If Jesus's words from the Sermon on the Mount are still relevant, and they are, how does He command believers to respond to this level of hatred and evil today? See Matthew 5:43-48.

9. What practical ways can Christians show love to their enemies, bless them that curse them, and do good to them that hate them?

10. In this world where people find sympathy for the ways they are oppressed, maligned, and victimized, Christians often fall into the trap of complaining about the ways they suffer for Jesus. Given these Beatitudes, what is the way Jesus calls His followers to respond? How does this change the way you view suffering for Jesus's sake?

11. What practical changes will you implement now that you know what Jesus expects of His followers when facing true suffering for His sake?