

Matthew 5:11-12 (NIV)

¹¹“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

40-05-16-The Culminating Beatitude

peace, soul-winning, discipleship, persecution

Mat 5:11-12

Suffering in Christ’s footsteps is the saint’s special blessing.

INTRODUCTION:

–Before **the culminating beatitude**, Jesus said in **Mat 5:9-10**, Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **As Prince of “peacemakers,”** Jesus suffered, and others have **followed in His steps...**

[MLK, Jr. was jailed and later shot in his **nonviolent fight for human rights. Bishop Hélder Câmara** in Brazil **fought for the poor while doubly persecuted** by a **corrupt government and by militant rebels** who hated his nonviolence.] **But, HOM.idea.**

–**v.11-12 culminates Christ’s beatitude list:** “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” This expanded what Jesus had said in **v.10**. Maybe He **concluded His list this way because...**

I. Persecution Is Inevitability– v.11, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

A. Treating persecution as a blessing highlights true Christian faith– Acts 5:41, The apostles [after being “flogged”] left the Sanhedrin, **rejoicing** because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.

1. Persecution **began in NT times, continued in the early church,** and became **commonplace in the modern missionary movement.**
2. In recent times, **violence escalated** worldwide, increasing yearly. **[Reports say** that each day 13 Christians die for their faith, 12 churches are attacked, 12 Christians are unjustly imprisoned, and another 5 are abducted.]
3. **[Tertullian** wrote, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”] **It’s true: the Gospel spreads at the price of many personal crosses.**

B. Christ’s promised blessing (“theirs is the kingdom of heaven”) partially explains **why the Church is persecuted, just the way Jesus was:**

1. We are **aliens**, citizens “of heaven” and **loyal to a holy King Who opposes this world’s ungodly activities and self-centered values.**
2. **Insults, ill-treatment, slander** are common in life, **but if,** as Jesus says, **they come “because of me,”** then we’re in “blessed” company– **John 15:20,** “Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”

TRANS: Paul wrote in 2 Tim 3:12, “everyone who wants to live a **godly life in Christ Jesus** will be persecuted.” Our Christianized nation sees persecution seldom. But as a global, cross-cultural *communion of saints*, whenever believers in other lands suffer, Christ’s whole Body suffers. We should pray daily for these suffering family members. [But, their **typical requests for prayer** show the depth of their “**godly life in Christ Jesus**”: “*Please, pray we be unafraid to share our faith, so that our persecutors can be saved.*” **A Coptic girl in Egypt**, whose father died when an Islamic terrorist bombed their church, told a TV reporter, “Let them know that we forgive them.”] These are strong examples of this culminating beatitude, a living testimony that suffering in Christ’s footsteps is the saints’ special blessing. And this is true, because...

II. Persecution Identifies Us with Jesus— v.12, “*Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*”

A. In Acts 14:22 (NKJV), when revisiting and encouraging “the disciples,”

Barnabas and Paul told them, “We must through **many tribulations** enter the kingdom of God.” (This wasn’t a warning but Christian realism!)

1. Paul knew just how Jesus suffered, yet he longed to identify with Him— Phil 3:10, I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the **fellowship of sharing in his sufferings**, becoming like him in his death.
2. Our identity *in Christ* gives us a “peace” that lets us face suffering with a “*blessed* [happy]” attitude— John 16:33 (NKJV), “These things I have spoken to you, that **in Me** you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but **be of good cheer**, I have overcome the world.”

B. That’s how Peter encouraged persecuted saints in 1 Pet 2:21, To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. (Some might think it illogical to “rejoice and be glad” about suffering, but we do have sound reasons for it!)

1. In a world that ignores *ultimates*, we await an ultimate blessing. (When temporarily maligned for Jesus, we look to a future day when Jesus will say to us, “Well done, good and faithful servant!... Come and share your master’s **happiness** [**same Gk root** for *blessedness*]!”)
2. Paul contrasts our brief *earthly suffering* with eternity’s *heavenly reward* — 2 Cor 4:17 (ESV), For this **light momentary affliction** is preparing for us **an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.**
3. But *Christ’s final reason* for saints to “*rejoice and be glad*” is that persecution joins us to the tried and true ranks of past believers: “*for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*”

- a. We’re “*blessed*” to join *other faithful saints on a well-worn path.*
- b. We’re “*blessed*” by the same grace that upheld them, the same “comfort” they received— 2 Cor 1:5, For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.
- c. And we’re “*blessed*” with the same divine strength that united them to Christ’s ultimate and eternal victory— 2 Cor 12:10, That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

CONCLUSION:

—[**Crosses** are *emblems of execution, even if treated as jewelry.* So, if worn, let them remind us of our *crucified Savior. Wear a cross necklace like the executioner’s noose*, a symbol of *death-to-self-will* in Christ. Let crosses be worn to identify us with His death and with the many martyrs in His *persecuted Body* throughout the world.]

—Suffering for Jesus doesn’t save us. His Cross saved us. But He says to “*rejoice and be glad*” when persecuted for Him, because, by uniting in faith with Jesus, His Resurrection becomes our *present and our eternal victory over all the suffering this world could ever throw at us.*

—**Suffering in Christ’s footsteps is the saint’s special blessing.** Jesus longs to tell us someday, “Come and share your master’s happiness!” But He calls us to that “happiness” **now** through this list of *be-attitudes*, and especially in this **culminating beatitude** about *cross-bearing*. And that call is given in His familiar words, “*Take up your cross and follow Me.*”