



## **Matthew 5:10**

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

### **Reflection**

Today we arrive at the eighth and final Beatitude. I don't know about you but these profound and carefully crafted truth statements by Jesus have left me both exhilarated and exhausted. I feel exhilarated because they've

raised my vision as to what it is to be a member of the kingdom of God, as to what it is to be a Christian – and I want to increasingly be like this. Yet in the same breath I feel exhausted because day after day I've been cut to the heart by Jesus' teaching and felt perhaps more strongly than ever how hard it is to be a member of the kingdom of God in a culture that is incessantly trying to pull me off course. God has been working in my heart through these beatitudes and if this is happening in me then I hope it is happening in you as well as you read, and think deeply over, and pray through Jesus' words here in Matthew chapter 5.

This last Beatitude in many ways brings us back down to earth and to perhaps further ground us in reality it's the only Beatitude that is expanded upon; it's not one verse but

three. And so we're going to speak about it generally today and more specifically tomorrow. The eighth and final Beatitude is this:

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Perhaps it's no surprise but today reality comes crashing down upon us. We probably shouldn't be surprised at this ending to a list that includes poverty, mourning, meekness, hunger and thirst – perhaps it's fitting that it should end with persecution. As we've touched on time and time again, through the beatitudes Jesus is teaching us about the kingdom of God and we've seen that it is diametrically opposed to the kingdom of this world. But we live in in-between times. For a time, for the time being, we're citizens of the king-

dom of God living on foreign shores, we're living in the kingdom of this world. And as has been stressed the kingdom of the God and the kingdom of this world don't overlay well. They don't blend well and even the existence of these two kingdoms side-by-side causes friction. In either scenario, overlaid or side-by-side there's trouble. If you're a Christian making compromises to your culture around you it just doesn't work, you're at war with yourself, torn, with a foot in the church and a foot in this world, which means you're unhappy, conflicted and ineffective. But if you fully embrace the kingdom of God, and live as a shining example of it in this world, well our passage today makes it very clear that you'll suffer for it. It's hard to be a Christian in these in-between times.

The reality of righteous living, the reality of

right actions lived out of a right relationship with God, is persecution. Which is a Christian word that simply means physical or verbal abuse or both directed at you because of your faith in Jesus. It can be subtle, or it can be overt, but whatever form it takes it hurts – and our passage is saying that it is inevitable for members of the kingdom of God. If you're a Christian living as a Christian should, then you'll experience persecution.

But praise God, because the rewards far outweigh these difficulties, and so Jesus ends right where he begins 'for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' Jesus began the Beatitudes with 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' and he ends the beatitudes with 'Blessed are those who are persecuted, for theirs is the kingdoms of heaven.'

He's raising our eyes to the prize. When we're persecuted we're blessed. When we suffer for being a Christian we're reminded of the goal of our faith and so even in the pain of persecution there is blessing and great joy to be had as through it we are reminded by the Holy Spirit of the inheritance to come. Paul explains the process in more detail in Romans 5:3–5 where he says amazingly,

‘Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.’

It's so countercultural and yet so true. Tomorrow Jesus is even going to tell us to rejoice and be glad when we suffer. It seems so counterintuitive but it will play itself out in your life, time and time again, just as it has done in the history of the church. Here's how it usually works: when we suffer, we pray for perseverance and God in the end usually gets us through it. Yet during our suffering we have plenty of time to think, to be reminded of who we are, and why we're going through what we're going through, which in the end always has sin as its root cause. The reality of our situation and the reality of the brokenness of the wider world around us sinks in with the kind of clarity and perspective that only pain and suffering can bring. Its character building, we're strengthened in our Christian character as we reach out and

cling tightly to God, the only constant and the only hope in our time of need. He sustains us, grows us, and makes us wiser and more resilient through his Holy Spirit, which leads us on to stronger faith in him and even greater hope about what our future holds in Christ. So our suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character and character hope – a hope that does not disappoint and all by the work of the Holy Spirit who constantly pours the love of God into our hearts to sustain us in our hour of need. This will play out in your own life just as it has history. Looking back at history some of the most explosive growth the church has ever seen, right down throughout history and still day, has happened in the hearts and lives and communities of Christians who were suffering most for the gospel.



## **Think**

This gives us so much to think and pray about. Should we be experiencing persecution? Yes, in some form, yes. Do we dare pray for suffering, if by it we are blessed? I don't think so, but Jesus' teaching today sure turns our perception of it on its head when it does come – and it will come.

## **Pray**

Spend some time now thinking and praying about suffering in your life and in the life of others.

And we'll take an even closer look at persecution and suffering tomorrow.