



Matthew 5:11–12

11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 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.

Reflection

The values and standards of Jesus are in direct conflict with the values and standards of the world. This has been the standout theme in each of the Beatitudes, and this will be the standout theme for the whole of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. So as the entry point into today's passage we're going to briefly work through the Beatitudes in this light.

The world says that those who are rich are blessed, not those who are poor. Equally it says the happy and carefree are blessed, not those who take evil seriously and mourn over it. Our culture holds up the strong, the confident, the Alpha men and women as blessed, not the meek and the gentle. It's the full and the satisfied who

are blessed, not those hunger and thirst for something better. The world tells us to mind our own business and not meddle in other people's affairs, to not be a 'do-gooder' showing mercy and trying to make peace. And in a dog-eat dog-world where the ends justify the means those who are pure in heart, the world tells us, those who refuse to compromise their integrity will never get far. Who are blessed in this world? Those who are financially secure and popular, not those who are being persecuted and suffering.

And so you can see that a Christian who follows the values and standards of Jesus is going to stand out in this world and for all the wrong reasons. And I think that's why the eighth and final beatitude emphasizes that Christians who live as members

of the kingdom of God will be persecuted, they will suffer for being Christians in our culture. This is emphasized in that the eighth beatitude is the only one to be expanded upon – in three verses instead of one. Yesterday we looked at it generally and today we’re going to look at it specifically. Today’s passage says,

‘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.’

Probably the first thing to note here is that the focus narrows more tightly around Jesus’ disciples. The other beatitudes were more general, ‘blessed are those,’ but

here Jesus is saying, 'blessed are you,' addressing his disciples (four of them at this stage, Peter, Andrew, James and John) and Christians down throughout the ages who are also followers of Jesus.

The focus of the persecution seems to narrow too. 'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, falsely say all kinds of evil against you.' Jesus is speaking here about insults, slander, and lies directed at Christians. Yesterday persecution would come as a result of righteous living in the world, but today Jesus has narrowed this down as well. Today Jesus is speaking about the insults and evil accusations that will come up on his disciples and us 'because of me' – because of Jesus.

When someone insults you to your face, or gossips behind your back, or posts something online about you, or directs their venom squarely at you in a text or a tweet – it really hurts. A lot of emotions can swirl up this moment, emotions like: shock, anger, shame, disbelief, betrayal, and that feeling of being sick to the stomach. But most of all it just hurts, it really hurts. And there are lots of ways to respond in that moment aren't there? You could retaliate with a comeback that puts them in their place. Or you could become depressed about it. Or you could be filled with self-pity and carry that around. Or maybe you could exercise a stiff upper lip, and grin and bear it, in a stoic kind of way. Some people over time when they're insulted over and over again can even begin to pretend they enjoy it in some kind of masochistic kind of

way.

But shockingly, in our passage today, Jesus advocates none of these responses. Shockingly he says that when you're insulted for being a Christian you should 'rejoice and be glad.' Now this is an extraordinary statement isn't it? When you're insulted, when out of the blue (and it can happen so fast today with social media) you're insulted for being a Christian and really hurt by someone's nasty words, rejoice and be glad. Just to be clear here, Jesus isn't saying to rejoice and be glad about the pain you're feeling or the evil that has been done to you. God looks down on this act of evil with great anger, and Jesus ultimately will judge the evil that has been done to you. What Jesus is saying is to rejoice and be glad because of two consequences of

what has happened to you.

And they are these, firstly great is your reward in heaven for being insulted for Jesus. You've been living visibly and openly as his follower, as a member of the kingdom of God, and you've been insulted for it and Jesus is saying that your reward in heaven will be great because of it. Now I'm not sure if Jesus is speaking here of some tangible reward in heaven or just that your presence in heaven with him will be the richest of rewards. But what he is saying is clear, the first consequence of being insulted on account of him is great reward in heaven.

The second consequence is this. When you're insulted because of Jesus, as the disciples soon would be by the religious

leaders of their day, this means that you stand in company with some of the greatest men and women in history, the prophets. They were hated and despised in their day to their very great glory, and you join their number when you are insulted – and of course when we are insulted for being a Christian stand alongside Jesus himself and you can never be in greater company than that. So for these two reasons we can rejoice and be glad even as we feel the pain of being insulted for Christ.

And you know Jesus' disciples must have listened very carefully to this because in Acts 5, after they'd not only been insulted but had been whipped for speaking about Jesus, Acts 5:41 says that they left rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name of Je-

sus. Can you imagine the scene? Can you imagine the impact their reaction would have had for the gospel on those around them? Not to mention the comfort they would have taken even as they suffered the after effects of such physical pain.

Think

So it would be great this morning to consider again the inevitability of suffering for the name of Jesus but also the appropriate response to suffering when it comes. Because if you're a member of the kingdom of God, suffering and persecution will come. It might take the form of subtle discrimination and exclusion in a social or business setting, or it might be venomous exchanges on Facebook, or even in person with a member of your family. Let

Jesus prepare your heart this morning to face those trials. Blessed are those who are insulted for his name, their reward is great, and they will stand amongst the heroes of the Christian faith, and alongside Jesus himself in their suffering.

Pray

Then spend some time praying. Perhaps you're being insulted at the moment. Perhaps you're afraid of conflict, you avoid it at all costs, you're not sure you're strong enough, or that your faith is strong enough to be attacked like this. Take it all to Jesus in prayer. Claim his promises in our passage today. And pray for his strength to powerfully work in you when persecution comes, and to powerfully work in Christians throughout the world who are being

persecuted right now even as you pray.

Tomorrow we'll encounter that famous biblical image of the salt of the earth. I hope you can join me for it.