

**Matthew 5: 10-12; “The Blessing of Being Persecuted”, Sermon # 14 in a series
entitled – “These Sayings of Mine”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on July 11th, 2021, in the Morning Worship Service.**

The wording of these verses is so contrary to fallen human nature that it cannot be believed by those who do not know Christ as their Savior. I am sure that is hard sometimes, even for the true Christian to receive these words. To be reviled and persecuted, is to have all kinds of evil spoken against you falsely, and it is not something that most people could ever think of as being a blessing, when they first hear it. Rather, they think of it as something which is to be avoided at all costs. However, if you will look at the wording of verse 11, you will see what makes all the difference, for the faithful follower of Jesus Christ. It is for the words that we find at the beginning of verse 10 and at the end of verse 11 – “for righteousness sake”, and “for my sake”. It is only when you are being persecuted for Christ’s sake, that then, you can rejoice.

For, we must understand this, that it is only the Lord Jesus Christ who can turn what is the worst thing that you can think of as happening to you, being persecuted, and He can make it a most blessed thing by the power of His grace. So, 1st of all – We want to consider the blessedness of being persecuted for righteousness sake. 2nd – We want to consider the blessedness of being reviled for Christ’s sake. And 3rd – We will consider the blessedness of being able to rejoice, in the greatness of your reward in heaven, when you endure persecution for Christ’s sake. May the Lord help each of us to receive these truths to the benefit of our souls, so that we might live them out, and glorify our great God who loves us.

1st of all – We want to consider the blessedness of being persecuted for righteousness sake. (verse 10)

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The blessedness which is being spoken of here, is the blessedness of doing what is right according to the Bible, even when sinful, selfish, falsely religious, and unbelieving people do not see it as right. Since Christ is the fulfillment of all righteousness and the end of the law for everyone who believes in Him, I hope you can see that those who are persecuted for righteousness sake are persecuted for His sake ultimately. What is persecution? Persecution is when you as a Christian are hated for being a Christian. And those who hate you go about to defame you, speak evil of you, punish you, harm you, or kill you because you belong to Christ and because you are truly righteous when they are not.

The reason that you are blessed when you are being persecuted for the sake of righteousness is because you realize that you have something very tangible spiritually which cannot be taken away from you. You have the kingdom of heaven with you, since you have believed in Jesus Christ. And that cannot, and it will not, be taken away from you. Yours is the kingdom of heaven. You can see the reasons for your being persecuted if you will turn to 1st John 3, verses 7-9. “Little children, let no one deceive you.” “He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.” “He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning.” “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.” “Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.”

Now, this seed remaining in you is the Holy Spirit’s work of causing you to be born again, and giving you a new nature. That new nature is the “seed” which is in you, and it remains in you all through your life after you have been saved. It is this new nature within you which cannot sin, and anything proceeding from your heart from this nature cannot sin. Even the new person that you are now, is identified with perfect righteousness, because of Christ being in you. All that you do from your being this new person with this new nature, keeps God’s

commandments. You practice righteousness and therefore you can most reasonably conclude that you are a righteous person. And other people will conclude the same.

Now, this does not at all mean that you are actually a perfect person in your heart and life, no matter how godly you become. Because you still have the flesh with you. It is true that the flesh is no longer reigning in your life. His power has been broken and you are no longer a slave of sin. And the Old Person which you once were, has been dethroned from reigning in your heart. It is a very wonderful reality that you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit when you have believed in Jesus. You walk according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh. It is the Spirit, Christ in you, who gives you the ability to face persecution.

You will remember Paul's conversion experience and how the Lord told Ananias to go talk to Saul and tell him – "I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake. That was a part of the commission which our Lord gave to him. But the same is true for us, to the extent that the Lord ordains sufferings for us, individually and particularly. But I want you to see that this is a blessed thing for the Christian, the one who understands that the Lord Himself is with him. Listen to Romans chapter 8, verse 16-18. Paul says here – "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together." "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

In other words, there will be sufferings that you as a Christian will experience in living your life to God and to Christ. These are a part of being in union with Him and identifying yourself publicly with Him in baptism. They are a part of your sanctification. They are a part of what it means for you to be conformed to Christ's image. So, after telling us in Romans 7, about the awful reality of indwelling sin, the remaining corruption in our hearts following conversion; Paul then goes on in chapter 8 to tell us that we still must do battle with the flesh after we come to Christ. We will do battle with the flesh as long as we live. We do battle with it by the Spirit's helping us to put it to death in our life.

And this same Spirit who bears witness with your spirit that you are a child of God, He will be assuring you that you are a joint heir with Jesus if you are willing to suffer with Christ. This willingness, He Himself works in your heart, and He confirms it in the day of His power. Psalm 110, verse 3 – "Your people shall volunteer freely in the day of Your power." What are we volunteering to do? We are volunteering to bear witness to the truth, and if needs be, to suffer for his name's sake. And so, in becoming a Christian you will realize over time, that it is a privilege to share with Him in His sufferings.

But you need not tremble or be dismayed. Rather, you must trust, that because God's word says that this is true, the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. And because He is with you, He will indeed make sure that it will be a blessed experience for all those who willingly suffer with Him. Romans 8: 28 confirms this. "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Does that "all things" include all of the sufferings that we with undergo for righteousness sake? Yes, it most certainly does.

For Paul goes on to say in verses 31-37 – "What shall we say to these things?" "If God is for us who can be against us?" "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" "Who shall bring a charge against God's elect?" "It is God who justifies." "Who is he who condemns?" "It is Christ who died and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" "Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" "As it is written: 'For Your sake we

are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” “Yet in all these things, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”

So this is the blessedness of being persecuted for righteousness sake; that is, for Christ’s sake. You will sometimes be persecuted for doing the right thing in the situation that you are in. The blessedness is, that you are sharing these sufferings together with Christ in your being persecuted. “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me,” Jesus says to him when he confronts him on the road to Damascus. Saul’s persecution of the saints was his persecuting Christ. Philippians 1: 29 – “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.”

The person who is willing to suffer for righteousness is willing to suffer to establish the keeping of any and all of God’s commandments. As you read down through the 10 commandments ask yourself whether you are willing to suffer for the truth that there is only one God, and this God subsists in 3 Persons. Thousands of Christians suffered and died back there in the first few centuries of the church, whether it was because they were being required to worship the emperor, or whether they were being persecuted by those who were Arians, people who did not believe in the Deity of Christ. Are you willing to suffer persecution from those who believe that it is right to worship idols? Thousands upon thousands of Christians were persecuted for this at many points in the history of the church.

Ask yourself whether you are willing to suffer to establish the 3rd commandment, that you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain? Please take the time to go through all of the commandments of the 10 commandments, and ask yourself whether you are willing to suffer for keeping them. Certainly the Lord Jesus did this, and He did it for your sake perfectly; keeping them all in order to love God preeminently on your behalf and in order to love His neighbor as himself, perfectly, on your behalf. Remembering this, it will help you to see the blessedness of suffering persecution when you realize that you are sharing in the fellowship of His sufferings.

2nd – We want to consider the blessedness of being reviled for Christ’s sake.

(verse 11)

“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all manner of evil falsely for My sake.” To revile someone is to criticize them in an abusive or angrily insulting manner; to speak of them in contemptuous language. So says the dictionary. As you read the Bible you see that reviling, very simply, is the sin of speaking evil of another person because you disapprove of them, or what they are doing. Usually this is done with a loud voice trying to draw the attention of others to what the reviler thinks, of the one that they are reviling. The intent of reviling is to speak evil of that person so as to defame them, in order that that person, or many people, might feel justified in persecuting them, in doing harm to them.

A reviler hates those they are reviling to the point of trying to say something or do something sinful against them. A reviler will sometimes verbally assault the person they hate with their tongue. They do not have any problem making false accusations, or making an innocent person feel guilty, or in placing false shame on the person they are speaking evil of. We do have several examples of this in the Bible; most of them in connection with our Lord Jesus Himself, or his followers. We will take a look at one, so that we will understand it better.

Turn with me over to John chapter 9, verses 24-34 where we will find a good example of this sin. “So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, ‘Give God the glory!’ “We know that this Man (that is, the Lord Jesus) is a sinner.” “He answered and said, ‘Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know.’ “One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see.” “They they said to him again, ‘What did He do to you?’ “How did He open your eyes?’ “He answered them, ‘I told you already, and you did not listen.’ “Why do you want to hear it again?’ “Do you

also want to become His disciples?” “Then they reviled him and said, ‘You are His disciple, but we are Moses’ disciples.’” “We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from.”

“The man answered and said to them, ‘Why this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes!’” “Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him.” “Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind.” “If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.” “They answered and said to him, ‘You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?’” “And they cast him out.” In other words, they persecuted this dear man because he had been healed by Christ, a man who had been born blind. They persecuted him by casting him out of the synagogue, and worship in the temple.

This man they reviled because of what Jesus had done for him. They hated Jesus without a righteous reason for hating Him. Anyone they knew who didn’t follow their false teachings, they would persecute because their righteousness was a self-righteousness. Now, you will notice, that they reviled this man when he refused to acknowledge that Jesus was a sinner. They wanted him to agree with their statement that they did not know where Jesus was from, even though He had done this mighty miracle. It was because of the man’s marveling that they could not see where Jesus was from, that led to their persecution of him. Everyone who loved and respected Jesus must be persecuted.

The blessedness of this persecution for this man was, he got a further interview with Jesus, and Christ’s talking with him confirmed him in His faith. It caused him to understand better the greatness and the glory of Christ and what He had done for him. Verses 35-39 – “Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, ‘Do you believe in the Son of God?’” “He answered and said, ‘Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?’” “And Jesus said to him, ‘You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.’” “Then he said, ‘Lord, I believe!’” “And he worshiped Him.” “And Jesus said, ‘For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.’” “Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, ‘Are we blind also?’” “Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, ‘We see.’” “Therefore your sin remains.”

So, you see what a blessed experience this reviling of this man turned into, for him! He was able to know Jesus better through it. He was able to perceive that He should worship Jesus for having healed him, and it confirmed him in the true faith of Christ, by the words of Christ’s own mouth blessing him. On the other hand, those who opposed Jesus and reviled Him, were pronounced to be spiritually blind, and told that their sin remained upon them. You should understand that Revilers are usually very proud people; men and women who view their own judgment of other people, and of truth itself, as being wise. Actually revilers are very hateful people who think that they are wiser than others by their own observation of things.

They are Moses’ disciples, they say here. They would justify themselves, not by faith in Jesus, but by their own words and works. But Jesus shows the blessedness of being reviled and being spoken evil of in Luke chapter 6 as well as here in Matthew that we are studying. He says in Luke 6: 22 – “Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man’s sake.” “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy!” What a radical reaction this is! The reason that a person who is being reviled and persecuted for Christ’s sake, can leap for joy, is that they actually will come into greater, more meaningful fellowship with Christ because of it.

This is why the apostle Paul said in Philippians chapter 3, verses 8-10 – Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be

found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, if by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the the dead.” Ah, my brethren, the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings is very sweet indeed. The blessing comes when you are content to lose all things that you may gain Christ.

And listen to the apostle Peter on this subject. 1st Peter 2: 19-24 – “For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.” “For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently?” “But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.” “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow in his steps: who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth’; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed.”

Therefore, you see, in order to become more like your Master, you His servant need to do good, and to know that at some points it will turn people against you. They will speak evil of you because you believe in Jesus, and they do not think that they need Jesus or want Him in their life. They will persecute you because you want to see righteousness established in your life and their life. And they think that they are righteous enough already. They think that they are righteous and wise by their own strength and their own understanding. They will continue to trust in their own righteousness unless the Lord shows them mercy. They will refuse to believe in Jesus, and they will revile the words that you say and the works that you do. But you will see the blessedness of this, for it will confirm you in your faith.

3rd – We will consider the blessedness of being able to rejoice in the greatness of your reward in heaven when you endure persecution for Christ’s sake.

In verse 12, Jesus says – “Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Now, this is something that we very much need to take notice of; that when we are reviled or persecuted, our Lord Jesus Christ is not simply asking us to be a stoic and go through these sufferings for His sake and for righteousness sake, simply putting up with them, and acting like you can bear it on your own. The Lord knows that there is no joy in that! He knows that in order for you to be able to glorify God, there must be something more than the long sad face. He knows that God will be glorified when you can rejoice in your trial; when you can even feel an exceeding gladness in your heart, that this trial and persecution has come to you. That is something that takes grace and Christ with you.

This joy and gladness will only come to you when you are holding fellowship and communion with the living risen Christ in your heart. The apostle James knew that, and so he wrote in his epistle – “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials.” He knew by experience, that these trials were the testing of his faith. But who is our faith in? It is in Christ Himself, His being with us. James knew that these trials will produce tangible spiritual fruit in your life, and so he said – Let patience have her perfect work so that you will be perfect and complete, and lacking in nothing. Dear Christian, do you look at it in that way? Do you lack wisdom? You are told to ask Christ in faith for it, and He will give it.

And in James 1: 12, James says – “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” Surely this is the reward of the Christian for his enduring persecution in this life. It is that the sufferings of this life will be reward with the crown of life in the next. The crown is having tremendous heavenly joy, peace, and the blessing of the Christ who loved you and gave Himself for you. You will remember that Peter and the other apostles were persecuted by the

high priest, the chief priests, and the Sadducees, when their preaching was meeting with great success. They said to Peter and the others with him in Acts 5: 28 – “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name?” “And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!” “But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men.’” “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.” “Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiven of sins.” “And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit has given to those who obey Him.”

When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them, it says. Gamaliel intervened and advised them not to take action against them, for they might find themselves fighting against God. And they agreed with him, and so when they called for the apostles, they had them beaten, and they commanded them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then they let them go. It says in verse 41 – “So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” This is how I pray that you and I will respond to reviling and persecution; that we would remember how great is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ! May we think of our sufferings as they did; as momentary light affliction.

And may we not think that there is no reward for serving Christ faithfully, under suffering or even death. Great will be the reward for those who suffered for Christ in this life, in the future world. There will be a reward for those who are found faithful according to their works, and how much they suffered to establish righteousness and Christ’s kingdom. The reward will of course, be of grace and not of debt, and the reason for this is, that the kind of suffering under persecution that we have been talking about, can only be endured with joy and rejoicing, if Christ Himself is present with you to establish all that you do and say at that time. But let us not be afraid of what mere man can do to us. Let us rather seek to have deeper communion with Christ, even if it does lead to suffering for His name’s sake.