

Sermon Title: The Price of Faithfulness

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Matt. 5:10-12 (Sermon on the Mount #9)

Date: 9-6-20

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Come with me now, back to Matthew Chapter 5. The Sermon on the Mount is Matthew Chapters 5, 6, and 7. We've started out this sermon of Jesus's in the most methodical way possible; we've been devoting one sermon to each of the so-called "Beatitudes"—or, "Blessings"—that Jesus pronounces on true disciples. This last one is a little bit different from the rest. Today we will finish the Beatitudes.

But, to get thinking about this: imagine if someone in your church came to you and said, "We need help in a certain ministry. We think you would do a good job at that." And so you were asked to serve as a deacon—especially to help care for some widows; and after doing that for a while, God opens many opportunities for you to preach the Gospel, and you go for it and incredible things happen. God uses you to bring many people to faith, even people from far away, even people from different cultures—and you're astounded at that. The local authorities, though, don't like it very much, and they start making a bunch of false accusations against you. None of them are true, but you can't seem to convince them of anything else; and even though they can't refute your defense, they just keep getting louder and louder.

Well, that's the backstory of Stephen, one of the first so-called "deacons," one of the seven chosen to assist the Apostles in the ministry to widows in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 6:5). The executioners were surrounding Stephen; they were ready to shove him out of town and push him off the ledge and rain stones down upon him until he died. Stephen spoke boldly until the end.

Form the pen of Luke, we have this record of what happened: Acts Chapter 7, starting at Verse 54—"Now when they heard this"—that is, his preaching, his defense—"they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him. But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse. When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul"—and you know him as the Apostle Paul (Acts 13:9). "They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!' Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them!' Having said this, he fell asleep" (vss. 54-60; NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted).

That's how one of the first non-apostolic servants of Jesus Christ was rewarded on Earth for his faithfulness in serving Jesus and preaching the gospel. God used him wonderfully, and his sermon—which is recorded in all of Acts Chapter 7—is a phenomenal overview of God's plan of redemption. If you ever want a quick overview of your Bible, just go read through Acts Chapter 7—it's all there.

Now, let's go forward almost two millennia. I was listening to a Christian music program that used to be on the radio years ago on Sunday mornings; it was a nice time for me, because I get up early and do a lot on Sunday morning before church. This particular program was sponsored at that time by one of the major publishers of Christian music,

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and it was designed to promote their artists and the products that they sell; and I happened to like the music that many of them did, so I would listen, typically. One day, a line from the host of that program hit me as if I'd been shot with a bullet. I may not have gotten it written down exactly word-for-word, but I got the meaning loud and clear. He said: "Buy our music so you can listen anytime you want." Hey, well, that's pretty cool; if you own it, you can listen to it anytime you want to! That even made sense. I mean, back in the olden days, they had these things called "cassettes" you could order; and then they had some flat things that looked like coasters, and you could play them. So I actually owned some of their music. "Buy our music so you can listen anytime you want to..." So far, so good. But he went on to say: "—to move into a deeper and more meaningful relationship with Christ."

I heard that, and I thought of the Apostles and the thousands who have met similar fates since then, in the almost 2,000 years of the history since then. I think of the Christians these days in Uganda and Nigeria and China and India and Iran and Iraq—and so many other places these days—who are being killed or imprisoned, or their homes and churches burned or bulldozed. I ponder those things, and I wonder what Stephen would think of somebody saying: "You really need a deeper and more meaningful relationship with Jesus, and you get that by buying our music." There's a *disconnect* there, isn't there?

There's something *more* to a deep and meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ, because "deep and meaningful relationship" *is not the goal!* Righteousness, truth, forgiveness, salvation, the Gospel—*that's* the issue! The glory of God—*that's* what we want to seek! If you want a "deep and meaningful relationship," you can get a cat! And if you get the right ones, they will *really like you!* You can be *very* tightly involved with them! I'd recommend a dog, but you can have a cat if you want. People have "deep and meaningful" relationships that are *totally immoral!* We're not looking for "deep and meaningful," we're looking for a *true relationship with God, our Creator!*

Now, a true relationship with Christ is described by Jesus throughout this sermon, but He begins with the Beatitudes that we have studied. He says: "Blessed is this kind of person, and the blessing is this..."—that's His pattern, all through all of them.

What kind of characteristics show up in the people who become "new creatures" in Christ? (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; cf. Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10) I know that verse hadn't been written yet, but Jesus is describing what He is looking for in the people who follow Him; and it's both the *expectation* of what He *wants* you to be, and it's the *description* of what He *makes* you to be—it's both of those together at the same time.

Look at this composite picture that He has painted for us. He has said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3)—that means, those who recognize that they have *nothing* that can help their spiritual condition of alienation from God (Rom. 8:8; 1 Cor. 2:14); they *must* have His grace (Rom. 3:24)—they can't fix themselves (Prov. 20:9; Jer. 13:23).

He said: "Blessed are those who mourn" (vs. 4) because they see their sin as God sees it, and so they hate it and they're repulsed by it (Ps. 51:4; Ezek. 20:43; Rom. 7:21-24).

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He said: "Blessed are the meek" (vs. 5, NKJV)—that's that character quality wrought by the Spirit of God (Ezek. 36:27; Heb. 13:21), working in the heart of a redeemed believer to stand on truth and have the "power under control," if you will, which is the way many describe "meekness."

He said: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (vs. 6)—that's the changed appetite, developed by God in His children so that you *want* the things that honor Him (Deut. 30:6; 1 Kings 8:58; Ps. 119:36; Phil. 2:13).

He said: "Blessed are the merciful" (vs. 7), because those who receive the mercy and forgiveness of God are *so changed by it* that they *become* instruments of mercy and forgiveness (Matt. 18:32-33; Eph. 4:32).

He said: "Blessed are the pure in heart" (vs. 8); that's the evidence that God is at work, transforming a life *from the inside out* (Acts 15:9; 16:14; cf. Ps. 51:6; Jer. 24:7)—in opposition to the ways of the Pharisees, who are going to be the antagonists in this sermon in a few verses, after we finish today; they were trying to reform people from the outside in (Matt. 23:25), by making up enough rules by which they would do enough behavior modification that God would like these people a whole lot (Rom. 9:31-32). They "trusted in themselves that they were righteous" (Lk. 18:9)—exactly the *opposite* of what Jesus said (Matt. 7:11; cf. Ps. 143:2; Ecc. 7:20).

Then He said: "Blessed are the peacemakers" (vs. 9)—that's the description of redeemed people who become instruments of truth and righteousness because *they* are now at peace with God (Lk. 8:39; Acts 26:29; Rom. 10:1; 2 Cor. 5:20); like Romans 5:1 says, that we saw last time: "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now, as I've said at every opportunity: These "Beatitudes"—that's just the Latin word for "Blessings," and He uses the word "blessed" in every one of these verses—all of these "Blessings" or "Beatitudes" are both the *description* of a Christian because they describe the fundamental changes that come with salvation, and they are also the *goals* of the Christian life because they describe the way that God intends for us to demonstrate our changed lives by the way we live in the world (Rom. 13:14; Gal. 2:20; 5:16; Eph. 2:10; 4:1; Phil. 2:12-15; Col. 1:10; 2:6; 1 Thess. 2:12; Titus 2:11-14).

Holiness—is that a gift of God in salvation? Yes (Phil. 3:9; Heb. 10:14). But is it the pursuit of everyone? Of course (Phil. 3:12-14; 1 Tim. 4:7; 2 Pet. 3:14). He said: "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16). It's both what God does, and it is our pursuit.

The Beatitudes close with the one we're going to see today, which is the *price-tag* for living out the life of a Christian. When you live as a Christian, some people *won't like it!* Persecution is part of the Christian life, to one extent or another, depending on your circumstances (Ps. 37:12; Jn. 7:7; 15:18-19; Gal. 4:29; 1 Pet. 4:4; 1 Jn. 3:12-13). Jesus promises to bless those who endure persecution for His sake (2 Tim. 2:12; cf. Matt. 24:13; Rev. 2:10; 3:10).

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Some see the three verses before us as two Beatitudes, because the word "blessed" occurs twice. Others—and I'm in this camp—see it as *one* Beatitude; it's stated first as a general principle, and then it's applied and elaborated upon in a very specific application. So we'll call it one Beatitude. We'll call it "The Price of Faithfulness." "Blessed are those who are persecuted."

Here's where we're going to go in three verses: Persecution in Principle, in Verse 10; Persecution in Person, in Verse 11; and then Persecution and Praise, in Verse 12.

Let's dive in at Matthew 5:10—"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." If the promise part of that sounds kind of familiar, it's because this promise is *exactly the same* as the promise of the first one: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (vs. 3). And remember, I told you: all of these are *emphatic* in their pronouns—"theirs *and theirs alone* is the kingdom of heaven"! *Nobody else* gets into the Kingdom of Heaven, except somebody who comes *completely* at the "mercy" of God (Rom. 9:16; Titus 3:5). "Theirs *and theirs alone* is the kingdom of heaven"—"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness."

This is talking about true believers. At this point, it's looking *backward*, before Christ; but the point is: No one gets into the Kingdom of Heaven except those who are described by these Beatitudes, and all of the good things that are described here are the gracious work of God (Jn. 3:21; Phil. 1:11). These Beatitudes describe the kind of people who are new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

Notice, He says: "have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness." He's obviously looking backward; it's actually a perfect tense: looking back to previous generations of faithful servants of God, up until Jesus's time—and surely, with all of the emphasis in the Gospels on John the Baptist, a lot of people understood him to be that; he was beheaded for his faith—I think I would call that persecution.

He said: "Blessed are those who *have been* persecuted." A Greek perfect tense says it's finished action in the past time, but the results are still in effect. Persecution has gone on for righteous people for a long time—forever (Gal. 4:29; 1 Jn. 3:12)—but it goes on today; and in the next verse, He's going to bring it into the present tense for *you*.

What does He mean by "persecution"? We can *easily* think we're being persecuted when things don't go well. I remember this *indignation* I felt when, a few years back, I hurt my leg really bad, and I was preaching from a wheelchair for a while, and I got to have one of those temporary handicap placards so I could park in the handicapped spaces. If you have not experienced it, you have *no idea* how *indignant* it makes you feel to pull up to a parking lot and *there are no handicap spaces!* What are you supposed to do?—especially when there's a nine-foot-tall giant pickup truck that you *know* no handicapped person could ever get in and out of without pole-vaulting, or a crane of some kind; and there's no placard, and they're taking up your space! That's *not* "persecution." That's disgusting, it's inconvenient, and it's frustrating—but it doesn't qualify as "persecution."

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"Persecution" is an interesting word. The root word actually means "to pursue," and in that sense, the word can be used in a very positive way, like: "pursue righteousness," one of the ways that it *is* used in the New Testament (e.g., Rom. 9:30; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22). But when it's used in a place like this, rightly translated "persecute," it means "pursuit in a hostile manner, harassment, molestation, injury, or driving someone away."

There was a guy in my second-year Greek class who had played a little bit of linebacker in the NFL. He *always* translated this word "pursuit," and it was his favorite word. Pursuing someone in a hostile manner, harassment, molestation, injury—he understood what it means to "persecute" somebody! Thankfully, I've never been a running back; I don't like linebackers coming after me like that. But do you understand what we're saying? "Pursuit in a hostile way."

In this Beatitude, Jesus is striking at one of the tenets of the Pharisees' teaching of His day. The rabbis generally taught that suffering and persecution is a sign of God's displeasure, and it is evidence of the *wickedness* of the one who is suffering. Remember John Chapter 9—the man who was "born blind," and Jesus healed him?—one of my favorite chapters in all of the Gospels. And remember: His disciples asked Him the question: "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" (vs. 2)

That was the *only* possibility they had ever been taught! He was born blind—that's because somebody sinned (Jb. 4:8; 22:4-5). Was it him, or was it his parents? And they actually had a corner of their theology in which a child could be punished for the sins of the parents—which is completely anti-Scripture (see Ezek. 18:20). But Jesus is saying, "No, this man was born blind for the glory of God."

So Jesus is talking about something that is very different than what the Pharisees taught; and as I said, when we finish today, we're going to be just a few verses away from Jesus taking a point-blank shot at the Pharisees and their false system of self-righteousness (Gal. 3:10-11, 21-22).

Jesus has a completely different perspective. He pronounces God's *blessing* on those who are persecuted! But there is one important qualification: "Blessed are those who have been persecuted *for the sake of righteousness*." Now don't slip by that phrase and go away thinking that God is duty-bound to give you some kind of goodies every time you are persecuted. If you are simply obnoxious, and you get persecuted because of that, you *are* enduring a Biblical principle—you "reap" what you "sow" (Gal. 6:7). But that's not persecution "for the sake of righteousness."

If you act like a fanatic without any decent judgment, the same thing is true. If you do something *wrong*, and it leads to negative consequences, God *is* at work in that, because that's part of how He "chastens" you because He "loves" you as His child (Heb. 12:6, NKJV). If you're being difficult, if you're complaining, if you're making yourself a nuisance somehow, if you're being a fool, if you are insulting people—you don't qualify for this blessing (see 1 Pet. 4:15-16). "Blessed are those who are *pursued in a hostile way* for the sake of righteousness."

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The Apostle Peter spent plenty of time stepping in messes of his own creation, when he would shoot off his mouth and then cause a problem; he acted out some rather brash impulses, but he went on later to write First Peter Chapter 2, Verses 19 and 20. You might think of this as an elaboration upon this final Beatitude. Peter says: "For this finds favor"—this is a blessing—"if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it, you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God."

Now Jesus was saying this because He was about to tell them: "By the way—this is going to happen to *you* because of your connection with Me." There were a lot of reasons why the early Christians were persecuted. There was the false accusation of cannibalism; somebody heard that they "eat" the "flesh" and "drink" the "blood" of Jesus (Jn. 6:53-56). "Well, obviously, they're cannibals"—and that was actually said of them.

By the way—I haven't heard that one said since a couple of years ago in Russia; that is what many of the Russians say about the "Protestants" over there—the Bible-believing people. They accuse them of eating their own children! That's one of the things that they say. What's the evidence for that? Well, *absolutely none*—never happened anywhere! But you can still get persecuted if somebody makes it up and says it's true of you (see Ps. 31:13, 18; 35:7, 11, 15, 20; 119:86; Is. 32:7; Rom. 3:8).

There's also the cumulative effect of the Gospel turning people away from immoral practices. It was a big deal when the Apostle Paul planted that church in Ephesus, and he stayed there for three years. Big city, thriving place, lots of people—the Gospel spread rather effectively there, and business dropped off in the temple of Diana (NASB—"Artemis"), where there were hundreds of temple prostitutes, and customers were being lost. There was also the issue of the silversmiths who lost business because people didn't want as many idols as they had formerly wanted (see Acts 19:23-27).

They were also persecuted sometimes because, just like Jesus said, families could be torn apart. When some would come to Christ, others would turn against them. Remember, we talked about it under "Blessed are the peacemakers"—Jesus also said: "I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34), meaning: family members can turn against each other (Matt. 10:35-37).

There was also the political reaction to it, based upon the jealousy and the paranoia of some of the political leaders. That started with King Herod himself; he had humbly given himself the title "King of the Jews," so when those "wise men" showed up from Persia and said, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?" (Matt. 2:1-2, NKJV)—Herod wasn't too happy, so he said, "Well, let's just slaughter all the babies in the area where they say He might be born."

They accused Jesus of being an insurrectionist against Rome (Lk. 23:2). They accused Paul of the same thing (Acts 24:5).

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And then there was that sticky little issue of the Christians—who, most of the time, were just *model* citizens—but they were hung up about burning a pinch of incense and saying: "Caesar is Lord." They would only say: "Jesus is Lord!"

So there's Persecution in Principle. God promises a blessing. As a matter of fact, that blessing is: belonging to the Kingdom of the Son of God. That's Persecution in Principle, which is blessed by God in every situation. Now, let's look at Persecution in Person.

Lest we think that this kind of persecution—when He says, "Blessed are those who *have been* persecuted," looking back to the prophets and the ones before—lest we think this is something that only super-saints of history had to deal with, Jesus gets really personal. Look at Verse 11—"Blessed are *you* when people insult *you* and persecute *you*, and falsely say all kinds of evil against *you* because of Me." "You" is the key word in that verse. Jesus switched from the Third Person—"those who have been persecuted"—to the very personal pronoun "you." If you follow Jesus, this will happen to *you*. They will do this *to you*. He says they will do this to you "because of Me." The better representative you are for Jesus Christ, the bigger and brighter the bullseye on your back to be aimed at by all who hate Christ (Jn. 15:18-19). This is a promise of God. It's not here to produce spiritual paranoia, it's reality. Again, you might get the idea that the Apostle Paul read and loved the Sermon on the Mount. He put it this way, in Second Timothy Chapter 3, Verse 12—"Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." That verse has no loopholes (1 Pet. 5:9).

How might it happen to you? Well, look back at the verse for some hints: "Blessed are you when people"—here's the first one—"insult you." There is no end to the creativity that godless people use to come up with fresh ways to insult children of God. You might be called a nerd—that's one of the nicer ones. You might be called a prude for not enjoying foul humor and filthy entertainment. Taunting can be tailored to whatever hurts you the most (Ps. 35:26). Name-calling is *never* going to go out of style; they can think of all kinds of awful things to call you. So, "Blessed are you when people insult you."

The second way they might do it—He says: "persecute you." Now, that's pretty general; that's just that word *diōkō*—"pursue." There are believers in the world—these days, right now, going on today—losing possessions for their faith. There are those today—maybe not in southern Idaho, but around the world—whose lives are in jeopardy if they attend a worship service at all similar to this. Do you know that the previous worst century for persecuting Christians was the *20th* Century? Not the First—the 20th Century. And now, we're just not quite 20 years into the 21st Century and were on pace to *outdo* the 20th Century. Persecution is *real*. We kind of live in a bubble where we haven't seen the most overt of it. It's still there, though.

Look at the third way—they "falsely say all kinds of evil against you" on account of Jesus. Have you ever had someone lie about you? That *really* stings. Have you ever had anybody attribute wicked motives to you, even when you do something good—assuming you have an evil motive? Have you ever had anybody spread misinformation to, say, keep *you* from getting a promotion at your job? That stuff *really* hurts!

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I've been the target of some vicious gossip attacks, one that *especially* hurt; I think it really was an attack of the Enemy early-on in my ministry, because it happened early-on. Some people spread the word that I just don't have a "pastor's heart." Now, what is that? Well, I *think* Jesus was pretty clear: "Feed My sheep. Tend My Lambs"—and that's what I had given my life to. I've had others say, "You just don't love the flock!" How do you *defend yourself* against an accusation like that? That's how it comes to *me*; it would be tailor-made for you—it'd be customized for something about you in your situation. I can tell you, it *really does* hurt.

Make sure that when cruel things are said about you, that you remain steadfast in serving the Lord. He tells you how to do that. We've seen Persecution in Principle. We've seen Persecution in Person. Now, let's look at Persecution and Praise, in Verse 12. Here's *how* you handle it when persecution comes your way. Verse 12—"Rejoice and be glad." Now, let me just stop there and point out to you: those are the *first two commands* in this chapter. There's not been a *single* command in any of the other Beatitudes so far. "Rejoice and be glad."

You can tell that when He says "rejoice," when He says "be glad," He's not talking about *emotions*. Why do I say that? You say, "Well, 'rejoice'—that means 'have joy.' I mean, 'joy' is a good feeling! 'Be glad'—I know what being 'glad' is. That really feels good!" Well, I *know* He's not talking about emotions because you can't *command* emotions—it can't be done! Emotions are *reactions* to circumstances, and life is *full* of emotions—good, bad, and indifferent—and they can change very radically at any time. But I can't order you to *feel* a certain way at a certain time!

He says: "Rejoice and be glad"—and then He gives a wonderful promise—"for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." This is not meant to tell you that when persecution comes, you *really should* feel happy about it. If persecution makes you feel happy...I think we need to talk! That's not right. I hope you never *find out* just how much it can hurt to be persecuted in that way.

It shouldn't make you *feel* happy, but here's the key. Understand: You can be *hurt*—there are painful things in the world; it's a fallen world. When someone dies, grief is real—even if we know that that person is with the Lord. When someone attributes an evil motive to you, *oh, that hurts!* When someone breaks your stuff, hurts your loved ones, *that pain is real!* But understand this, friends: You can be *very unhappy* and *totally joyful*. The reason is: being *happy* is a passing feeling related to whatever your circumstances might be. Being *joyful* is a disposition that is *theologically defined*. Joy comes from being anchored to Jesus Christ (Ps. 35:9), being anchored in eternal truths of God—and His grace, and His mercy in Christ (Is. 25:9; 61:10; Hab. 3:18). "The fruit of the Spirit is love, happiness"—no, wait a minute: "joy," right? (Gal. 5:2) You can have *joy* any time you choose to walk by the Spirit. Joy comes from the Lord (Jn. 15:11; 17:13). You can be unhappy when it comes to your bodily experience in the world. I mean, if you're in pain right now, you know what? *It hurts!* It's not fun! Don't deny it. But "rejoice and be glad," and if it's persecution coming your way, especially make the decision to be full of joy.



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We are never to be without joy (1 Thess. 5:6), because it is the inevitable product of the Gospel (Lk. 10:20; Acts 16:34; Phil. 3:1; 4:4). Now, is that hard to find sometimes? Well, *yeah*. You have to make decisions; you have to *choose* to think in certain ways, based upon what God says (Jer. 15:16).

But what is commanded here in Verse 12 is not related to this "world" (Jn. 14:27). "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great." Paying the price of faithfulness in this life is part of living in a sin-cursed, upside down world; there *will* be a price to pay. If you are righteous, and you have things right side up, you're going to be contrary to what the world says. But paying that price now is like an investment—it's going to be returned *multiplied* in "heaven," where "your reward...is great." (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17)

And then He mentions: "For in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Look back at those guys—most of them, I would say, didn't spend the majority of their days in what we would call "happy mode," but they have a great reward in Heaven. We don't have time to go dealing with their stories, but some of the most ugly, discouraging aspects of the history of the Old Testament is the treatment of the prophets (see Matt. 23:37; Heb. 11:35-38).

But do you know what Stephen said just before he was stoned for his faith in Christ and for preaching the Gospel? Acts Chapter 7, Verses 51 and 52—"You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become."

Why that? Why this emphasis on the prophets? Why this emphasis on the history lesson, that this is connected to "those who have been persecuted," and that's how it was with the prophets, and this is the way it's going to be for you? I think the message stands out pretty clearly: He's saying, in other words: "Persecution is not new. And what comes to you—it's not unique to you." The Righteous have endured it for all the generations that we know of (Gal. 4:29).

Next time, we're going to see what Jesus's purpose is for leaving you here on Earth right now. I mean, if you stopped with this Beatitude, you'd be praying like John at the end of the Book of Revelation: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20, NKJV)—"I mean, *get me out of here—I've had enough of this!*" But God has a purpose for you being here, and we're going to come to that next time we return to Matthew—next week, Lord willing.

Now, don't take this passage as an exhortation to begin to pray for persecution—that's not the point! I think, if you go looking for trouble, you can probably find it, alright? That's not our goal. But here's where I think we should land, by the time we finish the Beatitudes: It *is* legitimate to ask yourself if your life is making enough difference that the way you live evokes a reaction from people who hate Jesus. If your life is so comfortable that you are unschooled in persecution, I think you should wonder why. I think this is here for that purpose, among other things.

Sermon Title: The Price of Faithfulness

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Matt. 5:10-12 (Sermon on the Mount #9)

Date: 9-6-20

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Maybe you have insulated yourself from the people who need you most. There are some people who live lives so separated from everybody else that they didn't *notice* the Shutdown four months ago! We shouldn't live like that! One of the worst things American Evangelical Christianity and Fundamentalism has done is that it has defined spiritual maturity in such a way that you say: When somebody becomes really mature in Christ, they really aren't involved with anybody in the world (see 1 Cor. 5:9-11)—and that's not right! We should be deeply, *intimately* involved with each other, *so that* we are all the more equipped to take the Gospel *into the world* (Matt. 10:16; 28:19; Mk. 16:15; Jn. 20:21; Acts 1:8)—where, by the way, there's a lot of hostility against Jesus...But there are also souls that Christ died for, who need a Savior (1 Cor. 9:19-23; 2 Tim. 2:10).

Maybe the reason you aren't getting any flak is that you just don't have the resolve to live the life that Jesus designs for you. If it's just putting a façade on in front of Christians on Sunday mornings, maybe you're not really getting it. Spiritual chameleons don't make very many waves. In the next passage, we're going to see something different than just "getting along"—stay tuned for more.

But in the meantime, examine your life alongside these Beatitudes (2 Cor. 13:5; Jas. 1:22-25; 2 Pet. 1:9-10), and if you see something that needs work done, *today* is the *very best day* to begin talking to God about it (Ps. 119:59-60), and asking Him—by His grace—to make some changes (Ps. 119:35-37; 2 Thess. 3:5).

What have we seen?

"Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3)—Do you recognize that you have *nothing* in yourself to help your spiritual condition? (Eph. 2:12) "Alienated" from God (Col. 1:21)—you have no way to get back into relationship with Him (Rom. 8:8; cf. Ps. 5:4; Is. 59:2). *Only* His righteousness credited to your account can accomplish it! (Rom. 4:3; Phil. 3:9) Do you come to God with truly empty hands? "Lord, I have no hope! Help! *Help!*"

"Blessed are those who mourn" (vs. 4)—Do you mourn over your sin because you see it as God sees it, so you *hate* it and you want to turn from it? (Ezek. 20:43; Rom. 7:21-24)

"Blessed are the meek" (vs. 5, NKJV)—Do you have that character quality that is wrought by the Spirit of God working in the heart of someone who comes to Christ by faith, so that you love what God loves and you hate what He hates? (Deut. 30:6; Ps. 11:7; 97:10; Prov. 15:9; Ezek. 36:27)

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (vs. 6)—Do you have, and are you constantly cultivating more and more of, the appetite for the things of God? (Rom. 7:22; cf. Jos. 1:8; Ps. 1:2; 119:38, 97, 173; Jn. 17:17; Phil. 3:12-14; 2 Pet. 3:18)

"Blessed are the merciful" (vs. 7)—Those who receive the mercy of God, those who receive the forgiveness of God, can't help but become merciful and forgiving (Matt. 6:12; 18:32-33; Eph. 4:32). Are you an instrument of God's mercy to people around you? (Matt. 5:44-45; Rom. 12:14-21; Titus 3:2; Jude 22-23)

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If somebody looked at you (2 Cor. 3:2-3), would they be tempted to use the phrase "pure in heart" (vs. 8)? Is there evidence that God is at work, transforming your life from the inside out—from the heart out—so that you really do want the things that honor Him? (Phil. 2:13; Heb, 13:21)

"Blessed are the peacemakers" (vs. 9)—Are you one of His redeemed people who, "having been justified by faith," you now "have peace with God" (Rom. 5:1), so you become a "peacemaker"? (2 Cor. 5:20; Jas. 3:18)

And let's be honest: Are you being "persecuted"? (vs. 10)—Can people recognize enough of the essence of Jesus Christ in you to hate you, if they hate Him? (Jn. 7:7; cf. Prov. 28:4; 29:10, 27) Is it obvious that you represent Him in a world system that hates Him? (Jn. 15:18-19; 17:14) In other words, we need to be willing to pay the price for faithfulness! Christ paid the price for our sins (Gal. 2:20). He invites us all: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest...rest for your *souls*" (Matt. 11:28-29). If you're resting in Christ, if you're standing in Him, if you're "complete...in Him" (Col. 2:10), "justified by faith" (Rom. 3:28), standing in His "grace" (Rom. 5:2)—*it's going to show...but there will be a price to pay* (Rev. 12:17).

Let's pray:

*Father, how we thank You for Your great goodness to us in Christ. Father, we could never love what You love and hate what You hate, apart from You being at work in us. We would never have that hungering and thirsting for righteousness, if it were not that You have made us righteous in Christ. We could never be peacemakers if we were not at peace with You. Thank You for those and all the other blessings stated and hinted at in these Beatitudes. We pray, as we always do: have Your way with us. Whatever is needing to be dealt with, bring it to our minds, bring it to our attention. Bring alongside us brothers and sisters in Christ who can encourage and exhort and help and strengthen. May just us being together have Your intended effect of provoking one another to love and good deeds. Have Your way with us, we pray. If anyone is not at peace with You, not standing in Your grace, not yet forgiven of sin—please, today, put it in his or her heart to turn to You and to call out for Your grace and for Your mercy, and come to the Son, in whose name we pray. Amen.*