

Week 9: The Persecuted

Jesus is not describing eight different persons but is describing eight different qualities of the same person.

– Darrell Johnson

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

Theme: Persecution does not mean rejection, it means blessedness.

INTRODUCTION:

Icebreaker: Share a time when you got in trouble for doing the right things or if there has been a time you were made fun of for being a follower of Jesus, consider sharing that.

Opening Prayer: Have a member of the group offer a prayer to start the meeting.

Example Prayer: *Heavenly Father, teach us what it means to be persecuted for doing what is right and true, so that we can discover the beauty of your eternal kingdom. In Jesus name, Amen.*

LESSON BEGINS:

WEEK 9 BEATITUDE MEDITATION:

Read Matthew 5:3-9. Read together the first seven beatitudes, then have one person read Matthew 10-12.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the humble, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

MATTHEW 5:10-12:

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Discuss:

- What comes to your mind when you hear the word persecuted?
- How do you respond when people insult and lie about you?
- How in the world can Jesus consider those who are persecuted as blessed?
- What does it mean to be persecuted “because of righteousness?”
 - How is that different than what we may think of persecution?
- Have you ever experienced any kind of backlash because of your faith?
 - How did that make you feel? What was your response?

QUOTE: Darrell Johnson

Believers all over the world are experiencing persecution today, some in really painful ways. If we total up the number of Christians martyred. For their faith in the 20th century., it works out to an average of. 454,000 a year. It's estimated that over 200 million Christians. In 60 countries are currently being denied human rights because of their allegiance to Jesus. *(These were statistics from 2005).*

PERSECUTION TODAY:

Consider exploring *The Voice of the Martyrs*, www.persecution.com and/or *International Christian Concern* at www.persecution.org

WEEK 9 SERMON DISCUSSION:

Week 9 Sermon Discussion Questions:

This week the pastor discussed Matthew 5:10, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs..."

- What did the pastor say it meant to be persecuted because of righteousness?
- What did the pastor say it meant that the kingdom is theirs?
- How did the message change or enhance your understanding of this beatitude?
- Did the pastor say anything that was particularly meaningful or encouraging?
- How were you encouraged to apply this beatitude in your daily life or spiritual journey?
- Were there any questions or concerns that you had from the message?

A DOUBLE BEATITUDE:

Underline the words that appear negative and circle the words that appear positive as you read these verses.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5: 10-12)

For some reason, Jesus repeats and restates this beatitude. In repeating the Beatitude, Jesus shifts the pronouns. He moves from the third person 'they' to the first person 'you.' For the first time, Jesus brings himself into the picture when he says they will face this opposition 'because of Me.' Jesus is saying, 'I'm the problem. You will find yourself in difficult places because of me.' Jesus is not blessing those who get persecuted for being obnoxious, for being tactless, or who are culturally insensitive. Jesus is blessing those who find themselves in trouble because of him. - Darrell Johnson

- Why is it significant that the pronouns shift from third to first person.
- Why is it significant that the opposition we are blessed for is because of Jesus, not our own behavior?
- How do these significant perceptions change your understanding of this beatitude?

THE GOOD LIFE VIDEO WEEK 9 (with Derwin Gray)

Videos can be accessed at www.barmillscommunitychurch.org/goodlifevideos.

In this last session, Pastor Derwin teaches that happy are those who are persecuted for their identification with Jesus. While it may be unsettling to think of persecution bringing happiness, God often reveals His redemptive plan through persecution.

Watch The Good Life video 9: Part 1 [Persecuted]

Discuss:

- Why is it important to constantly remind ourselves that Jesus blesses those who face persecution because of righteousness? What dangers happen when we lose that perspective?
- How did Jesus embody righteousness and why did that lead to persecution?
- How did Jesus respond in the midst of persecution?
- Derwin suggests that "the game has changed." What does he mean by that?
- Do you agree that the American Church is being pushed to the margins, and that is a good thing? Why or why not?
- How can the Holy Spirit move and strengthen us in the midst of being persecuted for righteousness?

Watch The Good Life video 9: Part 2 [Persecuted]

- Why did the early church reject claiming “Caesar is Lord?” Was it worth the consequences?
- What did you think of the examples Derwin shared about the early church caring for people?
- Derwin asks, “If BMCC stopped to exist, would Buxton, Hollis, etc miss it?” Why or why not?
- How does Jesus compare to Barabas? How does this enhance our understanding of the gospel?
- What should be our posture to be as the church is pushed even more toward the margin? Why?
- How can we point to Jesus even in a changing culture?

PRAYING FOR THE PERSECUTOR:

Praying for our enemies fortifies our hearts against the disease that has infected those who are persecuted us.
– Derwin Gray

Matthew 5:43-45

“You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven.

Romans 12: 9-21

Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good. Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Take the lead in honoring one another. Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone’s eyes. If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God’s wrath, because it is written, Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord.

But “If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For in so doing you will be heaping fiery coals on his head.” Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.

- How can you love and pray for your enemies today?
- Beyond prayer, what are some ways you can extend kindness and compassion on those you might consider your enemies?
- How can caring for and praying for your enemies change your heart toward them?
- Who are some people you can pray and serve this week?

WEEK 9 WRAP-UP

Read Matthew 5:3-11 Out loud together as a group.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the humble, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

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

Closing Prayer: How can the group pray for you and others to have a “blessed” (*makarios*) week?

Have a group member close in prayer or provide an opportunity for all members to pray for each other.

For additional insight on being poor in spirit, read the following.

Chapter 9, ‘Happy are the Persecuted’ in *The Good Life*, by Derwin Gray

Chapter 9 ‘Happy Subversives’ in *The Beatitudes* by Darrell Johnson