

Blessed of God – Part V

(Matthew 5:10-12)

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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

Today we will continue our walk through the Sermon on the Mount with our text taken from Matthew, Chapter 5. We will look at a couple of verses which bring a close to that section commonly referred to as the Beatitudes, specifically considering verses 10 ó 12 this morning. Actually in preparing for the message today, I became persuaded that there is an important tie-in between what Christ is saying in these 2 verses with that which he communicates in verses 13 ó 16 where He uses the metaphors of salt and light to describe these same folks spoken of in the preceding verses ó that is the eternally blessed of God in Him. I really wanted to deliver this as one sermon; however, in order to do the subject justice, I have decided to deliver it in 2 consecutive sessions. So, during this 10 o'clock hour I will bring the first part taken from verses 10 ó 12, which I have titled, "Blessed of God ó Part V," this being the 5th in a series that will conclude our study of the Beatitudes ó verses that all begin, "Blessed are í ö Then in the 11 o'clock hour I will bring the sequel to this that deals with verses 13 ó 16, a message I have titled "Salt and Light." I do believe that these 2 messages are best heard together and I encourage any who might hear them later to consider both of them. Now look with me in Matthew 5, beginning in verse 10 where we read:

¹⁰Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. ¹²Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

1. Key phrases: As we first consider verses 10 ó 11, there are 2 phrases that are critical to our understanding. You may want to underline these in your Bible.

First ó in vs. 10, the phrase, "for righteousness sake" and then Secondly: in vs. 11, the phrase, "falsely, for my sake."

It is not everyone who suffers, nor even everyone who suffers for a religious cause, who is entitled to appropriate this consolation ó to consider their selves among the eternally blessed of God.

a. õFor righteousness sakeö ó Consider that this word, õrighteousnessö is the same word used in Romans 1:16 ó 17, where we read that the Gospel “...is the power of God unto salvation ... for therein is the **“righteousness” of God revealed.**” It is also the same word used in Acts 17 where it speaks of õrighteousnessö as the standard by which all shall be judged. It’s also the same word used in Romans 5:21 where it speaks of grace reigning through õrighteousness.ö The very reign or kingdom which Christ is speaking of throughout the Sermon on the Mount. It’s also the same word used in Romans 3 where it refers to the righteousness declared by the propitiation of Christ ó that is His provision of mercy for His people by way of satisfaction made to the justice of God on the cross through His obedience unto death ó His blood ó or His righteousness.

So it is evident that to be persecuted õfor righteousness sakeö refers only to that suffering which is a direct by-product of one’s stand for the Gospel ó God’s way of salvation conditioned on Christ alone ó based on the righteousness He alone established in perfectly satisfying God’s law and justice.

God requires perfection ó perfect obedience. He cannot and will not commune with sin. And where sin is found, His injured justice requires that a sufficient, infinitely valuable penalty be extracted as just punishment and payment ó requiring nothing less than the death of a suitable Substitute ó the impeccable, spotless God-man, the Lord our righteousness.

Now with this, õfor righteousness sake,ö set forth as the qualifying reason ó then and only then can one rightly judge their persecution to be an evidence that they are included among the blessed inhabitants of this kingdom ó of õtheirs being the kingdom of heavenö as we just read. This speaks of the kingdom, or the reign of grace ó grace reigning through the righteousness established by our Lord and Savior.

b. õFalsely for my sakeö ó Now consider again that what Christ came to this earth to do was to establish righteousness (i.e. ó to perfectly satisfy God’s law and justice). So then it’s apparent in verse 11 that to suffer for

His sake is essentially the very same as ðfor righteousness sake.ö Because to suffer for His sake is to suffer for that which His very person and work was all about ó the establishment of righteousness whereby God redeems and reconciles sinners unto Himself.

Still it is noteworthy that in vs. 11, where He speaks of that which is said against these blessed ones, that He adds the word, ðfalsely.ö You see, we have no warrant whatsoever when others accuse us of wrong doing to presume it to be an evidence of our being blessed if the accusation is accurate. In such cases, we only fool ourselves if we placate our conscience under the ridiculous notion that when others speak ill toward us by citing sinful conduct on our part, that such ðsufferingö falls into the category of being persecuted for righteousness sake (or for His sake falsely), if in reality the accusations are accurate. No, this qualifier makes it clear that Christ is referring only to that persecution which is a direct by-product of our stand in the Gospel ó for His sake, for righteousness sake.

2. Now consider the implications if there is an absence of persecution or suffering and how this should prompt us to examine our interest in Christ. Just as we saw in the other Beatitudes, we see here that each and every one of the eternally blessed of God (and only they) will suffer this sort of persecution that Christ is referring to in verses 10 - 12 ó at least to some degree. This does not suggest or promote some sort of persecution or martyr complex that would spur one to actively seek to be a victim or seeking out conflict with the lost religious world so as to derive a perverted sense of assurance from their self-inflicted misery or sacrifice. Similar to the sense we gained in the preceding verses, we don't seek persecution and suffering in order to be found among the blessed of God. It just goes with the territory. It accompanies the fellowship that believers, these blessed of God, have with their Lord and Savior in not only the wonderful eternal blessings they enjoy as heirs of all that He merited for them, but also the fellowship with His sufferings goes with the territory ó be it ever so small in contrast to that which our Lord suffered.

Consider the implication if we don't experience this sort of suffering or persecution ó at least to some degree. Christ said in Matthew 10:32 ó 33: **ðWhosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. ³³ But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.ö**

So, I find it important that we examine whether we do enter into the fellowship of His sufferings, we who profess to be recipients of the unspeakable riches of His grace and mercy. As we consider our own walk in this world, we know that if and when we are not actively involved in the ministry of the Gospel which confesses Christ before men, then we certainly will not suffer for it. Sadly, persistence on such a course is a denial of Christ Himself as I just read in Matthew 10. I believe such a self examination serves us well in the same vein of the exhortation given to professing believers in Hebrews chapter 3 where it reads in vs. 12 ó 15:

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.”

Again, we don't hold steadfast and persevere in our stand for Christ in order to receive God's blessing, but apart from such a walk, (or where there is an absence of any suffering or persecution for His sake) we should examine whether our confidence is indeed in Him and Him alone, or not. If it is, scripture makes clear it is only so by a miraculous work of His spirit in giving us life to look to Christ and Him alone. So, if we're not partakers of His sufferings to some degree, we do have reason to examine whether or not we truly are trusting in Christ and His finished work alone. We should examine whether there remains some -yet to be exposed- remnant of works to which we might unwittingly still be clinging.

3. Nature or forms of this persecution: Let's consider for a few moments the form or nature of the suffering that believers endure. The scripture here speaks about a situation when others shall "revile" you. This refers to defamation of character, slander, insult, or personal abuse that comes upon all who are the blessed of God, to some degree and in some fashion. It says they shall "...say all manner of evil against you..." ó albeit falsely. That word for "evil" is the same word used to describe none other than Satan Himself. It was helpful to me to consider the parallel passage to our text as recorded in Lk. Chap. 6. You may want to turn there and look with me quickly beginning it verse 22. There it is put this way:

“Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name

*as evil, for the Son of man's sake. ²³ Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets." And then down in verse 26:
"Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets."*

Notice that Luke describes it as being blessed when men hate you. With that in mind consider John 15: 18- 20, where Christ said: ¹⁸*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. ²⁰Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also."* Keep in mind that it was the professing religious world that Christ referred to here ó it was from religious leaders that He received the very worst treatment.

As I studied this I couldn't help but reflect on that fact that we here at Eager Avenue Grace Church have witnessed first-hand what it is to have enemies of God's pure gospel of grace side with the position of those who insisted that something more than the righteousness established in Christ's life and death is needed for the fulfillment of their redemption and justification. And as a result, they literally referred to our actions in refusing to compromise on that point as being "wicked and evil."

So, to the extent you identify with this church and its beliefs, you too know, at least in a small, but unmistakable way, what it is to have someone "say all manner of evil against you falsely" for the very reason identified here in the scripture ó for Christ's sake, for righteousness's sake.

And the accusations of evil were indeed false as men made untrue and unwarranted characterizations of us. They attempted to divert attention away from the real issue and accuse us of denying the work of God the Holy Spirit in us, in not believing in the necessity of the new birth ó a blatantly false accusation.

And they made these misleading characterizations merely because we believed that the miraculous, wonderful work of the Holy Spirit in us pointed us to Christ and to Him alone ó and not to anything produced in or by us, refusing to place the work of the Holy Spirit in a position of rivalry

with what Christ did for us. They opposed us because of our insistence in resting in Christ's finished work at Calvary in perfect and complete satisfaction to God's justice (righteousness) and it being made ours by imputation alone (that is God reckoning or charging to the sinners account all that their spotless Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ, merited for them, having borne and paid in full the demerit of all the sins that were charged or imputed to Him in His death on the cross. And it's our insistence that a sinner's acceptance before God is based on that imputed righteousness alone ó with no additional contribution, or completion of that which is presumed to have been an unfinished work at the cross, merely guaranteeing its completion based on that which is done by, through, or in us. In other words, it's the insistence that it is His righteousness and that alone whereby we are justified and redeemed.

Now in light of this, rejoice and be exceeding glad.ö I see in these light afflictions that we've endured, the unmistakable evidence of God's Spirit working in and through the citizens of His kingdom here in Albany, the blessed of God whose reward in heaven is indeed great. That's to be numbered with the saints of God. What a blessing!

You know, if we were content with simply acting justly towards others, being kind and loving, and charitable, but not insisting upon salvation by Christ alone, then we might go through the world, not only with peace, but we would probably be applauded. But consider what Paul wrote Timothy in 2 Tim 3:12 where we read, "***Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.***" You see, to live godly in Christ (to find your holiness there and no where else) exposes the evil of thinking to the contrary and that brings on persecution.

4. The Nature of this Blessing: Consider the paradox of the Christian life found here. Those who suffer persecution for Christ's sake are blessed and have reason to rejoice. Well, how can this be? First of all, simply because it is evidence that ötheirs is the kingdom of heavenö Is that not enough to rejoice in? The Christian life is full of strange paradoxes to our natural human reasoning, but which are easily understood by those blessed with spiritual life and its faculties to see and understand. This passage certainly falls in that category. As much as the experience of a believer in this life is painful and perplexing, God keeps us by His grace so that we wouldn't part from it for all the gold and comforts in this world.

But who, by mere human reasoning, would ever conclude that the persecuted and reviled are "blessed"? Let us consider a few scriptures that I think help us enter into an appreciation of this blessing.

a. Consider Phil. 3:20 where it reads: ***"For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:"*** The word, "conversation" there means community or citizenship. The believer's citizenship is not of this world. Believers are citizens of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven. So they breathe and live spiritually in a different community with an understanding foreign to this world. They have been brought to see that that which is highly esteemed among men (among the citizens of this world) is indeed an abomination before God (Luke 16:15).

b. Consider what Christ says later in His sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 6, beginning in verse 19 where it reads: ***"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: ²⁰But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: ²¹For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."***

c. Consider in Col 3:1-4: ***"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. ²Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. ³For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."***

I believe these verses teach that this ability to rejoice in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings is somewhat proportional to the extent to which the things of this world fade and diminish in their relative importance, commensurate with the degree to which our affections are set on things above and not on the things of this earth.

5. Consider that here in Matthew, Christ says to rejoice because of the company we keep, in awareness of the treatment of God's prophets who've gone on before us. And conversely, as we saw in the parallel passage in Luke, that to be spoken well of is to keep company with the false prophets who have gone before us.

a. Hebrews 11 speaks of some of these Old Testament saints in the chapter many have called the hall of fame of faith. It says of them there in verses 37 and following that ***"They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about***

in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; ³⁸(Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. ³⁹And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: ⁴⁰God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.” (They too being justified with us by the accomplished work at the cross of Calvary, God forbearing with their sins until they were taken care of by Him at the cross).

b. Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Tim 2:8-12: *“Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: ⁹Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. ¹⁰Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. ¹¹It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: ¹²If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us:”*

c. Moses was defamed again and again, Samuel was rejected, Elijah was despised, Nehemiah was oppressed and defamed ó then in the N.T., Stephen was stoned, Peter and John cast into prison, James beheaded, and the entire course of the record of Paul was a series of bitter and relentless persecutions. Then the scriptures tell us that Christ Himself was ódespised and rejected of menó and ultimately was put to death by the people to whom He ministered.

In summary, although we can be grateful that in the society and age we live in today, that a stand for Christ and His Gospel doesn’t typically bring such calamity on us as it did so many believers in the past and that our afflictions are indeed light by comparison ó we still are blessed because we are given the unspeakable privilege of having like fellowship with the sufferings of our Savior which testify to us that we shall also fellowship with Him eternally in the riches of His glory, the unspeakable joys and blessings of eternal bliss with Him.

“Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven:”

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God’s grace found in the only infallible source, God’s word itself ó the Bible.