

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Seeing and Delighting in Jesus through an Expository
Journey through the **Gospel of Matthew**

23- The Kingdom of Heaven and Its Citizens- Part 3
The Citizens of the Kingdom are
“Blessed” in Persecution

Church July 31, 2022

Matthew 5:3-12

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

4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

5 "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

10 "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

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

12 "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

*To the Glory of God the Father; God the Son;
and God the Holy Spirit. Amen*

Now last time, we saw that Jesus- acting as the *2nd and last* Moses- is now going to give the Jews of the 1st Century and us- the *first* Body of deep and serious Divine Teaching¹ from Chapter 5 all the way to the End of Chapter 7. And this Body of Teaching has become known to us as the “*Sermon on the Mount*”, which is the greatest Sermon ever given.

And we are looking at the *Beginning* of this great Sermon in a

¹ Matthew divides his Gospel Record with 5 “Bodies” of Teaching which represent the five Books of Moses

collection of verses that we call, the “*Beatitudes*”- which describes the Attributes and the Characteristics of the “*new people of God*”, who will dwell in the “*new Kingdom of Heaven*.”

And, last time, we covered the first four and today- we need to look at the 5th Beatitude that says:

5. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy

The “*new citizens*” of this new “*Kingdom of Heaven*” will be people of Mercy. So, because they have received Mercy from God- they will be *eager* to give Mercy to others. Now please remember that Mercy is NOT *earned*; nor is it *deserved*. Mercy is given to patently guilty sinners based on nothing but the Kindness of the one giving it. But we also need to remember that Mercy is NOT some Obligation on the one giving it. So, by definition, Mercy is ALWAYS “*Free*” on the part of God; and it is ALWAYS “*Glorious*.” On our part.

Yet there are times, when Mercy is frowned on by people- even some in the Church. Yet I say there is not a single saved person on this earth, who now loves and follows Jesus- who has not already received Mercy from God- many times.

But because of Flesh- many of those, who are genuinely striving to be Holy- tend to view Mercy as being “*Leniency*” or even “*Lawlessness*”. Many of those, who work so hard at Obedience themselves- have a hard time being merciful to those who don’t appear to be striving as hard as they are. And so, they see Mercy as being a sinful “*Compromise*.” And as something that allows people to “get away with something”- without any Penalty.

Think of this. Because of their own carnality- they look at one of the most precious fruit of the Spirit- the Mercy of God- as being something Ugly and Wrong and even Sinful- that compromises with Sin. And that is NOT the fruit of being Holy, dear friends, it is simply being a Self-righteous Pharisee.

If any Teaching or any Doctrine causes a genuine citizen of the new Kingdom to see Mercy as being something that is Wrong or Bad or even Sinful- then that person has forgotten that he *needs* God’s Mercy all the time. And that means that there is never a time when showing Mercy is wrong. It is ALWAYS correct to be merciful. And the ones who are the freest to give Mercy to undeserving sinners- are those who recognize their own Need for Mercy for themselves.

But we must always remember that Mercy is ALWAYS undeserved. Mercy is NEVER earned. Mercy is ONLY given to people who NEED it- NOT to people, who deserve it. And because the Bible- ALL BY ITSELF- is like a two-edged sword that cuts and divides- the Man, who uses that Word- must be a man of Mercy.

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

Not a single soul on earth is “**pure in heart**”. Every soul, born of Woman, is utterly fallen and sinful from the very moment of Conception. So, this Characteristic has to do with the Work that God does in the citizens of the new Kingdom- in giving us the new Nature. Jesus could have simply said- “*Blessed are the saved for they shall see God*”- because ONLY the saved are “made Pure” by the sovereign Work of God.

Also, this is not about us literally “seeing” God- because as sinners, to look at God would destroy us. But when the Fullness of this new Kingdom is made manifest- ALL of the true citizens will behold God- in His Glory- with eyes that have never seen Sin.

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

Now the “**peace**” that Jesus spoke about here has NOTHING to do with the absence of human Warfare or an End of War between the Nations. With all our advancements in Technology and Medicine and Education and Science- I think there are something like 36 wars going on all around the world this morning. So, this “Peacemaking” is NOT about the United Nations or about the normal “Peace Negotiations” that go on all the time.

The “Peace” Jesus speaks of here is a “Peace with God.” You see, as sinners, we are at War with God. We think we should be able to do whatever is right in our own eyes; and God has decreed Commandments that *restrict* our Behavior. So, there is great Tension between the Almighty and the “creatures of the dust” that are *determined* to rebel against Him.

But we must acknowledge that our Sin insults and belittles God’s Worth and Value and Glory. Because if God was as glorious as the Bible declares- then why wouldn’t we love and delight in Him? And so, we participate in other things that promise us Fun and Love and Pleasure and Enjoyment. And we engage in those things- precisely because we do NOT view God as being the Treasure of the Universe.

But the Belittling and the Insulting that we perpetrate on God’s pristine Holiness through our Sin- *forces* God to defend His great Name- that has been belittled and ignored by our Transgressions. So, it is the Defense of His Glory that is called “God’s Wrath”.

You see, God is Love- but God is NOT Wrath. The opposite of God being Love- is God being Righteous. And so, God judges and damns ALL Sin. Because

if God did not judge and damn all Sin- He would be agreeing with the sinner that His Glory was NOT worth defending.

So, the “Peacemakers” here are those, who go about bringing an end of the War between God and sinful Man. So, the “Peacemakers” are actually the Preachers; and Teachers; and Elders; and Deacons; and every day, normal citizens of the new Kingdom- who go about heralding the “Good News” that God has offered total Forgiveness and Entrance into Paradise to patently unworthy rebels. But the catch is that in order to obtain this Forgiveness- there MUST be a total and complete and unconditional Surrender.

And the Promise from Jesus is that those who do this- will be looked at as belonging to the Family of God. And they will be called, “God’s Children”; or “God’s Sons and Daughters” and they will see God.

8. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

This final Beatitude has to do with something that NOBODY wants; and one that ALWAYS surprises those who are faced with it. Persecution against God’s people is one of the most *common* things that happens to us. And yet- most people always respond with Astonishment when it comes. And they say things like, “*I can’t believe what they said to me*” or they say, “*Don’t they see that I’m trying to help them*”?

But Jesus does NOT simply say that we WILL be persecuted- He says that we are “BLESSED” when we are. We are “FAVORED BY GOD” and “HAPPY” when we are persecuted! Yet more tears and more anxiety and more feeling sorry for ourselves- comes because of Persecution than any other Event.

So, yes, ALL who will live godly in Christ Jesus SHALL suffer Persecution (2Timothy 3:12). But here, Jesus goes WAY BEYOND merely *guaranteeing* that we will be persecuted. Here, Jesus says that when you are:

- Insulted
- Persecuted
- Lied about
- Spoken Evil of

... you are BLESSED!

Now keep in mind that what is attacked in this Persecution is our own personal Integrity; our Testimony; and our Reputation. People are angry that we have exalted Jesus; or because we have preached the Gospel and called them to

Repentance; or because we have refused to agree with something they wanted us to do because of some Righteous Cause. And so, they lash out at us; and insult us; or lie about us; or speak evil of us. But what is really attacked is our Testimony; or our Reputation; or our Integrity- the very things that we work so hard to be in line with Scripture.

And that hurts us- precisely because we pray hard and work hard to make sure that our Testimony and our Reputation and our Integrity is godly and in accord with Scripture. And so, when those things are attacked- we want to rise up; speak out; and defend ourselves. Yet that is NOT what Jesus said to do.

What we must understand is that WE are the only ones who can damage our Testimony. Somebody accusing us wrongly CANNOT damage what God has given us. Now some people may believe them- but, in the End, God will vindicate us. So, when we rise up to defend ourselves it reveals a lack of trust in us as to God's Sovereignty in defending us.

So, when our Integrity or our Testimony; or our Reputation is being attacked- we get angry; and mad; and we want those who are attacking us to know who we really are. But the very LAST thing we experience during these times- is Joy or Gladness. We certainly DON'T feel "Blessed"; and the LAST thing we want to do when we are persecuted- is Rejoice!

But then Jesus gave one of the most *disobeyed* Commandments in all the Bible. The Lord Christ COMMANDED us that when we are persecuted- we are to...

REJOICE AND BE GLAD!

Now some of us might be pretty good at outwardly *faking* our Rejoicing. We can put on a plastic politician's Smile and *pretend* that we are rejoicing- in order to make people think we are really spiritual. But then Jesus told us to "BE" Glad. Not "act" like we're Glad- NOT to fake it- but to actually "BE" Glad. And nobody can fake "*being*". When it comes to "*being*"- we either are; or we are not. So, this Joy; this Gladness is a sovereign Gift from God and NOT something we can "work up" in ourselves through Discipline and putting forth more Effort.

But there are things that might help. And one of them is to remember how we pray. Many of us ask God to make us Humble; or to humble us. And the reason we know that is because God has said clearly and repeatedly:

GOD RESISTS THE PROUD BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE

So, when we are operating in Pride or in Arrogance or in Self-righteousness- God RESISTS us. God fights against us; God withholds from us. But if we are humble- God has promised to give us His Grace. Now it needs to be said here that Grace is NOT the Reward that Humbleness earns. Grace CANNOT be earned. Like Mercy- Grace is given by God according to His Own Divine Prerogative.

So, Mercy is defined as God holding back from us- what we DO deserve. So, for example, anytime we sin- God would be perfectly Just if He were to instantly annihilate us right on the spot! And yet, most of the time- God doesn't do that. But the ONLY reason God doesn't pour out the Fury of His Wrath on us the very moment we sin- is because of His Mercy.

But there are other times, when there is a terrible so-called, "Natural Disaster" when tens or even hundreds of thousands of people are killed in mere seconds. This is an example of God NOT giving those people His Mercy and, instead, giving them what they HAVE earned and DO deserve. Every one of those people were guilty sinners. And NONE of them deserved God's Mercy. Now He might have given them His Mercy anyway- but in this case- He gave them what they deserved- Judgment. And that is why God said in **Romans 9:15&16:**

15 For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION."

16 So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

But God's Grace is defined as God giving something to us- that we do NOT deserve. Like Salvation or the Power to rejoice in Persecution. And so, Grace is seen as:

- God's *unmerited* Favor
- God's *unearned* special Treatment
- God's *undeserved* Love

So, Grace is God giving guilty sinners His "Favor"- that they have NOT merited. It is God giving us some kind of special Treatment that we have NOT earned. Or it is understood as God giving us some degree of His Love- that we do NOT deserve.

Now by using the words, "unmerited"; "unearned"; and "undeserved" we mean to say that God is also NOT *Obligated* to give anyone His Grace. God distributes His Grace in the same Way that He distributes His Mercy- by His Own Divine Prerogative. So, by definition, Grace is NOT distributed to everyone. And even

among those to whom it is distributed- Grace is NOT distributed in equal measures or amounts. And this means that everybody does NOT get Grace. Some do- but some don't.

So, the way we should understand this- is to say that- in His Kindness- God gives some people a little Grace. Now we must keep in mind that these people didn't deserve what God gave them; they have NOT earned it. Yet God gives them some of His Grace.

But others get more Grace. And still others get tremendous amounts of Grace. And that unequal distribution of God's Grace is based on only one thing: God's Will. So, Grace is the Gift that godly Humility unlocks.

And so, we see the great Value of having God's Grace. And so, we seek to be Humble. But we forget that the Process of becoming Humble is the Path of Humiliation. In other words, Humiliation is the way God has designed that we become Humble.

Yet when we are humiliated- we get angry and seek after Retribution. And our Anger at Humiliation is based on- Pride. Those, who humiliated us- have damaged our Pride. And so, we rise up to defend ourselves and to deliver ourselves out of that Humiliation. But all we have done is to cut ourselves off from the Process that God has brought into our lives to answer our Prayer and make us Humble. So, we need to ask ourselves if we really want to be Humble- since we CANNOT be Humble without damaging our Pride.

Now many will look at the Beatitudes and think well of them. It is hard to find anybody, who will attack the Attributes and Characteristics that are taught here in the Beatitudes. But when it comes to Persecution- many today think this is something that has become outdated in the 21st Century.

With our advancements in Civil Rights and the abundance of Lawyers who are eager to sue people, who even speak against us- many today see verbal or physical Persecution as something that no longer exists.

Yet we can see that so far in the 21st Century- we are on the way to this Century having the MOST Persecution all around the world. Modern Society has NOT become so tolerant that talk of Persecution is outdated. And that means that Teaching on Persecution and how to handle it when it comes- is very relevant in the 21st Century.

For example, according to *Open Doors Evangelistic Association*- 13 Christians are martyred every day around the world. That's over 400 per month or almost 4800 per year.

According to the World Christian Encyclopedia, 2.2 billion people lived in 79 countries under significant Restrictions on their religious Freedom in 2020. Sixty percent of all Christians live in these countries. And sixteen percent (224

million) of all Christians live in countries where there is severe State of interference and harassment.

So, the least we can say is that, from a global standpoint, the Words of Jesus are very relevant, and indeed very precious, for millions of our brothers and sisters who live under the Pressure of constant Surveillance.

My second reason for saying that these words about Persecution are relevant today is taken from the words of Paul in **2 Timothy 3:12** where the Apostle wrote:

Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (See also The Acts 14:22; John 15:20; Matthew 10:25)

How could Paul make such a general Statement about ALL, who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus? He made it on the basis of a deep Conviction about both the Nature of Christianity and the Nature of the sinfulness of Man. Paul was convinced that there is such a constant Tension between the Message; the Way of Life; and the Worldview that is taught in the Holy Bible on the one hand, and the Mindset; Way of Life; and Worldview of the lost and fallen world on the other, that Conflict is inevitable.

Because the Christian Message is NOT merely at odds with the Worldview of the Lost World- but it seeks for all who follow Jesus to consciously *reject* and *denounce* and *not participate in* the Worldview of the lost World.

And because Paul's Conviction was rooted in the Nature of fallen Man and the Nature of the new Creation in Christ- it never goes out of date. So, it is still true today. And that means that, sooner or later, a deeply God-centered Christian will be mistreated for the things he believes or the Life he lives.

So, these Words of Jesus about Persecution are relevant for today not only because millions of Christians all around the world are being persecuted for their Faith as we sit in this Sanctuary this morning- but also because- to one degree or another- all of you who are dead-earnest about putting God first in your Work and in your Home and in your School; and in your leisure Time- will bump into some form of Opposition. None of us knows when our Freedoms and civil Rights may cease; or when we may be called by God to go to a very dangerous place; or take a stand here at Home that will cause many to dislike us.

So, the first thing we need to understand is WHY the Persecutions come. And this is important because not all persecuted people are "blessed." Only those who are persecuted- FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE- are "blessed". People, who are persecuted for other reasons are NOT the focus of Jesus' Words here.

So, let us remember the Structure of the Beatitudes. There are two groups of four, and each group ends with a reference to Righteousness. The first group ends with verse 6:

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

And the second group ends with verse 10:

"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The three Beatitudes that lead to a "*Hunger*" for Righteousness are descriptions of what I call, a "*Holy Emptiness*." Blessed are the poor in spirit; those who mourn over their needy Condition before God; and the Humble- who hand their Cause over to God. It's natural that these three Descriptions of Emptiness and Need should be followed by a Description of "Hunger" and "Thirst". Because if you don't have something- you hunger and thirst for it.

Then *second* three Beatitudes are Descriptions- NOT of an "*Emptiness*"- but of a "*Fullness*." The Hunger is beginning to be satisfied by an overflowing Mercy; and a pure heart; and a Power to make Peace. So, the Righteousness longed for in verse 6- is given in the form of Mercy; Purity of heart; and Peacemaking. And the result is Persecution for this very Righteousness.

Another way to define the Righteousness of verse 10 is to look at its parallel in verse 11. In verse 10, the Persecution is "**for the sake of righteousness**" but in verse 11, it is "**because of Me [Jesus]**" "**Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.**" So, "**because of Me [Jesus]**" and "**for the sake of Righteousness**" mean the same thing.

So, what we learn from this is that *true* Righteousness- the Righteousness that *surpasses* the Righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (**Matthew 5:20**)- ALWAYS involves a strong and vibrant Relationship with Jesus. True Righteousness is not done for its own sake. It is done for Jesus's sake. The Mercy and the Purity of Heart and the Peacemaking of a disciple of Jesus comes from Jesus (**Without Me you can do nothing.** [John 15:5]) and is done for the Glory of Jesus. So, it's this "Attachment" to Jesus that gives our Righteousness its distinct Character. But that raises a Question:

If that is what Righteousness means- being Merciful; and Pure in Heart; and Peaceable by relying on Jesus and living for His Glory- why would anybody persecute that?

... it doesn't seem very offensive. In other words, why would anybody get angry with someone, who is trying to merely give Jesus glory by "putting on Righteousness"?

And the Answer that goes to the Root Cause is found in **Luke 16:13-15** that says,

13 "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him.

15 And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God."

Jesus makes the Statement in verse 13- "**You cannot serve God and wealth.**" And then the Persecution comes in verse 14:

the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him.

And Dr. Luke tells us why they scoffed at Jesus' words,

the Pharisees ... were lovers of money

... in other words, Jesus's Teaching about NOT loving Money is seen as an attack on their love of Money.

Then comes the rest of the explanation of their Mockery in verse 15:

... You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men...

So here is the Root of this Persecution with its two sides. One side is the love of something Evil or untrue; while the other side is the Need to *justify* that Love. And this is the Root Cause of ALL Persecution. When the Word of God is given- they will either become Convicted and repent and believe; or they will persecute you.

Jesus comes on the scene with a Way of Life and a Message that implies that the love of money is Treason against God. "**No servant can serve two masters**" And, in and of itself- this is NOT an antagonistic Insult. It is part of Jesus' perfect

Purity. It is true. And it is *essential* to know if you are going to be forgiven and made Righteous.

But that Teaching goes against the Pharisees' Love of Money. So, to justify themselves, the Pharisees MUST put Jesus down. This is standard operating procedure (SOP) for ALL Self-justification. And this is the Root of ALL Persecution.

And this helps us to understand WHY a Life devoted to Righteousness or Godliness will be persecuted or reviled or spoken against.

- If you cherish Chastity, your Life will be an attack on people's Love for free Sex.
- If you embrace Temperance, your Life will be a Statement against the Love of Alcohol.
- If you pursue Self-control, your Life will indict excess Eating.
- If you live simply and happily, you will show the folly of Luxury.
- If you walk humbly with your God, you will expose the Evil of Pride.
- If you are punctual and thorough in your Dealings, you will lay open the Inferiority of Laziness and Negligence.
- If you speak with Compassion, you will throw Callousness into sharp Relief.
- If you are Earnest, you will make those who are Flippant look- Flippant instead of Clever.
- if you are spiritually minded, you will expose the worldly-mindedness of those around you.

When you desire to be Godly in all your Affairs and Relationships; when you follow the Righteousness of Jesus in His Strength and for His Glory- there are ONLY two possible Responses that people can have, who stay around you. And these are described in **John 3:20&21:**

20 "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

21 "But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

So, one possible Response is for them to hate the Light and not "come to it." But the other possible Response is for them to "do the Truth" and "come to the Light"- freely admitting that all "Good" in us is accomplished by God. In other words, they can repent and be saved; or they can persecute you.

Okay, but what about all the people in my Life, who don't come to the Truth- but they don't persecute me either. They're just quiet and may even be polite. There are at least two possible Explanations for this:

1. Your Light is hidden under a bushel. You are keeping the stumbling block of the Cross well concealed (**Galatians 5:11; 6:12-13**). And you're NOT allowing your distinctive Values to show.
2. You are letting your Values show and the people around you are moving toward one or the other of these two Responses: Persecution or Conversion.

... and keep in mind that neither of these must happen *immediately*.

There are all kinds of Factors that can hinder expressions of Persecution. We see these often in the Gospels when the Pharisees were angered but were hindered by Expediency from expressing their Anger in outright Persecution. Neither Persecution nor Conversion will always happen *immediately*. In fact, many people are torn inside themselves, partly hating the Truth Claims of Christianity in your Life- while partly being attracted to them.

So, we should all examine ourselves to see if we are playing a kind of cowardly Christian incognito. And if we are, we should repent and resolve to be more sincere in the Expression of who we really are. But we must not assume that, because there is no Persecution right now and no Conversion right now, that we're doing something wrong.

The gestation period for the New Birth may be nearing a happy End, or the Storm may be ready to break against you. But in either case, you can be very content.

Verses 11&12: Blessed are you [favored] when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Now this is a shocking piece of Counsel. What can possibly justify the Command to “**be Glad**” when we are hated and mocked and tortured and killed? And make no mistake about this- Jesus absolutely DOES have Death in view here. Because that is what they did to the Prophets (**Matthew 23:30; 1Kings 18:13; 19:10; Nehemiah 9:26; Jeremiah 26:23**) And this is what they WILL DO to Jesus' disciples. So, Jesus says in **Matthew 24:9**,

Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.

What can justify such Counsel to people in Pain?- **“Rejoice and be glad!”** Seriously? Does anybody actually obey this Command? I see two Possibilities:

1. Either this is the Talk of an insensitive, sophomoric, ivory tower Theologian, who has never known what it is to scream with Pain
2. This is the talk of One Who has seen something and tasted something and knows something about a Reality that most people have never known

We must remember that this is the Lord Christ speaking. This is NOT some pastoral novice- who blunders into a funeral home slapping people on the back, saying, *“Praise God, he’s in a better place- why all the gloom and doom?”* This is the Lord.

And He says to His disciples, most of whom will drink the cup of Martyrdom themselves in just a few years from now, **“Rejoice and be glad” when you are persecuted, when you suffer.** How can He say this?

Jesus can say this because of what He promised:

... for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

... and this Promise is NOT some, “pie-in-the-sky” Statement from an eternal Optimist. Jesus knows what the Kingdom of Heaven is like in its fullness- because He has lived there since Eternity Past. And by saying it like this- Jesus is telling us that beyond any shadow of a doubt- the Reward of us being in the Kingdom of Heaven will be so much greater than any Suffering we have to endure down here in the Service of Jesus Christ that there is no comparison. And the Apostle Paul agreed when he said in **Romans 8:18:**

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Jesus said, **“Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great!”** But there is a Mystery here- the Mystery of Joy in the midst of Agony; the Mystery of Gladness in the midst of Misery and Groaning; the Mystery of Rejoicing in the midst of Pain and Suffering.

And this Mystery is contained in a Miracle- the Miracle of Faith- the bedrock Assurance that Heaven is a ten billionfold Compensation for every Pain experienced in the Service to the King. So, to the degree that you believe in the Value and Glory and Beauty and Importance of what Jesus sees in Heaven- to that

same degree you will be able to Rejoice and be Glad in Suffering. But this raises yet another Question:

In order for us to rejoice and be glad in Suffering and Persecution- don't we have to believe that the Suffering itself *enlarges* our Reward in Heaven? In other words- if the same Reward in Heaven could be obtained without any Suffering, would we not cry out against the uselessness of Suffering rather than being glad to embrace it?

If nothing more comes of Suffering, than of not suffering, why embrace it with Joy? What gave Rowland Taylor (1510-1555); and Bishop Nicholas Ridley (1500-1555); and John Bradford (1510-1555) the Impulse to kiss the Stakes at which they were burned to Death? What moved Obadiah Holmes (1610-1682), after receiving ninety lashes that he turned his back to jelly for Jesus, to say to the magistrates, "*You have struck me with roses*"? Why did Thomas Hardcastle (d. 1678) say that Persecution was "*a precious season of grace*"?

Were these men and a million more like them simply deceived? Was their Hope in an eternal Reward for their Faithfulness- even unto Death- the Belief of madmen? Or were these men (and all the others) some of the greatest men who ever lived?

I think the Answer is that the *more* your Faith is tested through Suffering- the greater will be your Reward. I think this is taught in **Matthew 19:29** when Jesus said,

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life.

... and *especially* in **2Corinthians 4:17&18:**

17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,

18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Here the Apostle says that our Afflictions; Sufferings; or Persecutions "**produces**" or "*brings about*" an "**eternal weight of glory**". Or as Charles Hodge (1797-1898) said,

“Afflictions are the cause of eternal glory. Not the meritorious cause, but still the procuring cause. God has seen fit to reveal his purpose not only to reward with exceeding joy the afflictions of his people, but to make those afflictions the means of working out that joy.”²

In other words, rejoice and be glad in the midst of Suffering for Righteousness and for Jesus, because that very Suffering will receive a very great Compensation and a very great Reward. And the greater the Suffering your Faith endures- the greater the Reward you will receive in Heaven. So, rejoice and be glad, for great is your Reward in heaven!

Now I want to drive home one of the clear Implications of this Passage. Jesus wills for His disciples to desire the Reward of Heaven MORE than we desire the Reward of this World. Jesus wills for us to have our Treasure in Heaven and not on the earth (**Matthew 6:19&20**). And Jesus wills for our hearts to be so set on Heaven that to leave this earth is a cause of Rejoicing. Yet the Mystery will be that our Rejoicing will NOT occur without many tears because Paul also infallibly said, **As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing... (2Corinthians 6:10)**

... and as Jesus sweat blood in Gethsemane in the face of His Own Pain on the Cross- **“for the joy set before Him- He endured the cross...”**

Jesus wills for us to have our Hearts *primarily* in Heaven; our Hopes *primarily* in Heaven; our Longings *primarily* in Heaven; and our Joy *primarily* in Heaven. Why? Because there is no other way that you can rejoice and be glad when you lose all of your earthly Joys. How shall we rejoice and be glad when these things are taken from us if we have not loved Heaven *more*?

So, what shall we do? How shall we keep our hearts in Heaven? Make a regular practice of your life to consider the Prophets of Old, who were persecuted and killed for the Cause of God and Righteousness. Turn often to **Hebrews 11:36-38** and read how that “by Faith” these people suffered **mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.**

... and if you are tempted to think that these men were somehow lacking in their Faith and that is why they suffered so- then read verse 39 that says,

² Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians, 104

And all these, having gained approval through their faith...

Go often to these great men and women of old and get inside their hearts. Put yourself on the rack with them and learn how to love Heaven with them. Listen as they say,

... the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt ... (Hebrews 11:26).

Read the Testimonies of those who have given their all for Christ. The Letter of John Hooper, written three weeks before he was burned at the stake in England in 1555:

“You must now turn all your [thoughts] from the peril you see and mark the felicity that followeth the peril . . . Beware of beholding too much the felicity or misery of this world; for the consideration and too earnest love or fear of either of them draweth from God”³.

You children, consider the children of John Rogers. He was burned alive the same year Hooper was, because of his Faith in Christ. And his children accompanied him to the place of execution and called out Encouragements to him through their tears that he might be strong and not turn back and dishonor Christ.⁴

Or consider the famous Dietrich Bonhoeffer. As he left his prison room on the way to the gallows in 1945, he said to Payne Best,

“This is the end — for me the beginning of life”⁵

... and ten years later the Camp doctor wrote,

“At the place of execution, he again said a short prayer and then climbed the steps to the gallows, brave and composed. His death ensued after a few seconds. In the almost fifty years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God.”⁶

³ Ryle, *Light from Old Times*, 115

⁴ Ibid, 64

⁵ *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, 830

⁶ Ibid, 830

Or consider the last letter of Vanya Moiseyev, the twenty-year-old Baptist soldier in the Soviet Red Army. He had been tortured for many weeks. And on July 16, 1972, they went too far, and he died. But on July 15, the day before he was tortured to death, he wrote to his brother Vladimir,

“Don’t tell our parents everything. Just tell them, ‘Vanya wrote me a letter and writes that Jesus Christ is going into battle. This is a Christian battle, and he doesn’t know whether he will be back.’ I desire that all of you, dear friend, young and old, remember this one verse: **The Revelation 2:10- “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”**”⁷

So, look to the Prophets. Look to the Martyrs. And whatever you must do to get your heart in Heaven and off the world- do it! Otherwise, you will not be able to obey the Command of our Lord, **“Rejoice and be glad in Persecution, for great is your reward in heaven.”**

And if someone should ask whether having our heart in Heaven will make us useless on earth, the Answer is given by Jesus in the very next paragraph of the Sermon on the Mount. People who have their hearts so much in Heaven that they fear no man but rejoice in Persecution- such radically free and joyful people are the **“salt of the earth”** and the **“light of the world.”**

Amen. Let’s pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.

⁷ Vanya, 175

