



TRUTH IN LOVE

Shedding Light on the Word of God

Seven Steps to Persecution

Matthew 5:10

***¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***

In the first seven Beatitudes, Jesus has been explaining to those who would follow Him on the path of discipleship what they must do and what attitudes they must develop if they are going to be His disciples. The Beatitudes are introductory and preparatory for all that Christ is going to teach in His Discipleship Manual, the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:9 was the seventh and final attitude (or step), in developing the discipleship mindset. It had the highest cost but also greatest reward.

But Christ is not done. He has one more Beatitude (in vv 10-12), which is not one more step to take, but rather explains the result or outcome of taking the seven steps already laid out in 5:3-9. Forgetting for a moment what Jesus says in Matthew 5:10, what normally follows a series of steps in our culture today? “Ten Steps to Success.” “Seven Steps to a Fulfilled Life.” “Twelve Steps to Freedom.” “Three Steps to a Happy Marriage.” You’ll even get these sorts of sermon series in most of our churches. That’s what people want. Those are the things that motivate people to take the steps suggested.

But what does Jesus say will be the result if you follow His “Seven Steps”? He says you will be **persecuted!** Have you ever heard a sermon series called “Seven Steps to Persecution”? I haven’t. A pastor might empty his church if he preached a series like that. It sure wouldn’t attract visitors if they announced that series on their reader board. But Jesus is preaching that series, and He expects people to follow. When we talk about being followers of Christ, we envision peace, prosperity and protection, but not persecution. We sing “Wherever He leads, I’ll go” but when we find out He’s leading us to persecution, we abandon Christ faster than Peter and the other disciples did in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Christ certainly knows this, so why is He telling us? Because He doesn’t hide the truth. He tells it like it is. Frankly, pastors and teachers who aren’t honest with their congregations about the high cost of discipleship are only setting their people up for disillusionment and great disappointment. People who follow Christ can expect the same treatment in this life that He received. If they hated Him, they will hate us also (John 15:18).

Of course, this is a Beatitude, and so there is an associated blessing that comes with persecution. It is the persecuted who are the **Blessed**. And Christ will explain what the blessing is, but first He makes a qualification. There is only one kind of persecution which receives the blessing of this final beatitude. It is the persecution that comes **for righteousness sake**, that is, *because* we are living righteously.

Many people (both Christians and non-Christians) experience persecution. Some because of their race or ethnicity. Some because of their economic or political status. Some think they are being persecuted, but really are just receiving the natural results of being rude or arrogant toward others. None of these are what Jesus is talking about.

The kind of persecution that receives His blessing is the kind that comes as a result of living for Christ. If we do what Christ commands in Matthew 5–7, and as a result, experience persecution, this beatitude applies to us. These other forms of persecution can be beneficial as well depending on how we respond (cf. Jas 1:2-3), but they are not what Christ has in mind here.

This blessing is reserved for those who are persecuted for following Him. And what is this blessing? They receive **the kingdom of heaven**. This same result was part of the first Beatitude (5:3), and means the same thing here. Receiving the kingdom of heaven is not the same thing as going to heaven, otherwise, going to heaven would be based on works. Anyone who believes in Jesus for everlasting life gets to go to heaven completely free of charge, no strings attached. But receiving the kingdom is like inheriting the kingdom, or receiving reward in the kingdom, which is only for those believers who live faithfully to Christ. That this is what Christ means is seen by His elaboration in vv 11-12, but we'll save that for next month.

So the seven steps of discipleship leads to persecution, but persecution in this life is not the end. Great blessing awaits those who are persecuted for righteousness sake and are suffering for rewards in eternity.

Family and Ministry Update

The semester is winding down, and we're all looking forward to a break during the summer. Since I'm taking three weeks of summer school, my summer doesn't start until June 5. These three weeks will be hard on us as a family, so we would appreciate your prayers.

I spoke twice in April at Berean Memorial Church in Irving, TX, at both the Sunday morning and Sunday evening service on Palm Sunday. They are a wonderful church, and have an excellent CD ministry which sends recorded sermons all over the world. You can see some of what they offer at www.berean-church.org.

I am also scheduled to speak three times in May, and once in June, and will keep you updated about that in future newsletters. These messages will be available online at www.tillhecomes.org.

At work I am making lots of progress on the commentary we are publishing later this year. I finished editing Hebrews and James this month, and started on 1 Peter last week. Though I've read and studied James numerous times before, I am always convicted by what it says. It is a hard-hitting book about church life and how to live as a Christian. If you ever feel the need to be convicted of something in your life, try prayerfully reading the book of James!

The family is doing well. Kahlea still cries an awful lot as she has colic (or is simply inconsolable), but seems to be *slowly* improving. I know I've mentioned this before, so thank you for your prayers regarding this as well. Taylor and Selah are enjoying being big sisters, even with all of the adjustments.

Financially, God continues to provide for us in amazing, unique and creative ways. This continues to show us that seminary is exactly where He wants us right now. As someone once told me, "Where God guides, He provides." However, we are already beginning to plan and dream about what He might want us to do after seminary. "Wherever He leads, we'll go."



Taylor, Selah and baby Kahlea

TILL HE COMES,
Jeremy Myers