

Blessed Are the Despised

Luke 6:22-23

July 2, 2017

We are studying the beatitudes, which is the introduction to Jesus' most well-known sermon. The, this introduction to the sermon, I think, in my mind anyway, it's been nothing short of revolutionary. Not in the political sense, not in any social, economical, or political statement. Any of that would be too shallow for this. Jesus, is as revolutionary in the sense that Jesus has introduced a new and a profoundly countercultural worldview. This is a worldview here that confronts and subverts and actually reverses all the values of the world.

And as we're going to see today, living by the worldview that Jesus Christ gives us here, it draws us into a world of conflict. It brings persecution. I have been a part of a number of training academies and such throughout my military life and law enforcement life. Often instructors would get up early on in

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the training and say something like this, "Gentleman, look to your right and look to your left. The person standing next to you will likely not be here at the end of training." And that was an, an opportunity for them to weigh upon us with the gravity and the difficulty of the training we were about to go through, the pain we would go through and suffer.

Inevitably, they were right. They had seen classes come and classes go and be whittled down to those few who made it through the training. And they were right about its pain and its difficulty and its travail. And there's a sense in which Jesus is doing that here, warning us about what is to come, what we're going to face as Christians. Persecution and suffering are our lot in life. It's a difficult road. That's why Jesus calls it a narrow road. That's why he says you have to press and squeeze through a narrow gate. It does cull the ranks, doesn't it? Persecution in particular thins the ranks of those who profess Jesus Christ.

We're gonna begin, as we have been accustomed to doing, by reading the beatitudes and we'll just read the beatitudes this

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time and leave the woes for later. Look at verse 20. It says, "Jesus lifted up his eyes on his disciples and he said: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, but you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your names as evil, on account of the Son of man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.'"

As the first sentence indicates, Jesus has aimed this introduction at his disciples. And you'll notice, as we went through there, you've probably noticed week by week, that there is a progression here. A logical movement from one beatitude to the next. He's moved from poverty to hunger, to weeping, to persecution. And as he does so, it dawns on us that this is indeed the common shared experience of every true believer. Jesus has just described his true disciples as the poor, as the hungry, as the weeping, the hated.

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And although their situation seems to many to be regrettable, and although their current present circumstances appear to be undesirable, wholly undesirable, what can be observed by outward observation in their station in life, it actually belies their true situation. It actually doesn't tell the full story. It doesn't tell the full truth. Though they are poor, they are actually quite rich. Because it says here they are in possession of the eternal kingdom of God.

As we said to possess that kingdom, true disciples have had to let go of everything. They've detached their hearts from all that the rest of the world has counted dear. And that's what makes them like poor destitute beggars on earth. They stretch empty hands upward to God. It's exactly the right posture before God because God is pleased to reward those who come to him empty handed, demanding nothing, but only asking in humble and penitent faith.

Sinclair Ferguson has said, "In this kingdom, one must be emptied in order to be filled." That's exactly right. We're by nature too full to be filled. We tend to be satisfied with all

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the wrong things. So the Gospel, in order to affect us, it must deconstruct us in order to reconstruct us. And it's by God's amazing grace that God first empties us, that he strips us bare, in order that he might fill us, in order that he might enrich us. He pries away from our small grasp, our small fingers, he pries away everything that is small and fleeting and temporal. He takes it away from our clutching hands so that we might open them wide and then he can fill us with all of his fullness.

Those who are the true disciples, as possessors of God's eternal kingdom, they have awakened to the true nature of their current condition in this world. That is to say, they've awakened to find within them a gnawing insatiable hunger. They've also awakened to the reality of sin. Those are both in verse 21. That reality of sin causes them to weep, to shed tears, to mourn sin and its consequences. And when we see that, that is proof positive that they have been regenerated to new life.

The evidence of that new life is in new affections, in godly affections. That is to say, the person who's been truly saved, truly born again, they have a love for God, and a love for his

Word, and a love for righteousness. And on the other hand, they have an opposite affection. They have a hatred of all that offends and opposes God. The longer they remain in the world, the more they know God, the more acutely they sense, verse 21, their hunger for God, their hatred for sin, which is the cause of their weeping.

Now as I've said, Luke's presentation of the Sermon on the Mount, his record of Jesus' sermon is a little bit different than Matthew's. In this, it's aimed primarily at a Gentile audience. You remember from verse 17 that those who originally heard this sermon were both Jews and Gentiles. So when Jesus addresses this mixed crowd, he begins here in the beatitudes with Gospel themes. Some of these themes pertain to the Jewish background and you can find those in Matthew. Others pertain to the Gentile background that's where we are in Luke.

Luke's account here highlights the Gospel themes that are targeted to the Gentiles. And as we have seen over the past two weeks, these are themes that take us all the way back to the very beginning of time, to the very beginning of mankind, to the

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creation and to the fall. "Blessed are the hungry," that reminds us that God created us with an appetite. Most immediately a physical appetite.

And it's true that daily regular satisfaction of that physical hunger that we learn about the source of the spiritual satisfaction, which is God and God alone. Just as God gives us our daily bread, so also, he provides us with the living bread, the one who came down from heaven to give us his own body as food to eat.

The next one, "Blessed are the weeping," that reminds us that God did not create us to weep. That's not part of his original creation. So we know that weeping points to something post-fall. It points to the problem of sin. We're called to think about the fundamental problem of the world, which is buried in, deep within every human heart. It's sin that makes the world weep. But it's only those who have their eyes opened by God to these spiritual realities of sin and salvation. It's they and they alone who see that sin is the problem and that drives them to

look to God's salvation as the only answer. Only God can put an end to human weeping.

So these are the themes that form the structure of Jesus' worldview. And by reflecting and meditating on what Jesus has said here in just these first three beatitudes, we really learn all the elements of a comprehensive and logically consistent worldview. Jesus tells us where we've come from, where we're going. He tells us what we were made for. He points us to what is wrong with the world and mankind in particular. He points us to the remedy, which is close intimate association with himself, the Son of Man.

In other words, Jesus has told us very clearly that we came from God, we're going to God, we're made only to be satisfied in God and not in ourselves or any other created thing. Only God can provide that satisfaction and that brings all glory to him and none to us. We've departed from God, though. We've departed from that original design. God is the perfect satisfaction of our souls but because of sin, we've left him behind. We've rebelled against him and that is the cause of all weeping.

But we also know that only God holds the remedy. He himself is the remedy. And he will one day erase all of our weeping with laughter and as it says in the end of Revelation, he'll wipe every tear from our eyes. That is the worldview of the Son of Man. And he's calling all of his true disciples to get that and to live that way now. Not to live in this present world like the rest of the world does, not to chase its ambitions, not to chase its pleasures, not to find satisfaction in everything they find satisfaction in, but to give themselves fully to this worldview. This is the worldview of all who are Jesus' true disciples.

That's what we've all believed. That's what we've all come to understand. And that's how we all live. You might think that people who have been so revolutionized by these truths, which you could see on the face of it. Even an unbeliever reads this and sees the excellence and the virtue written here. That's why it's the most well-known of all that Jesus has said. It comes out of the Sermon on the Mount. So you might think that people who have been so captivated by this, captivated by the glory of God, transformed by the grace of God, you might think that people like would be the most admired people in the world.

You might think that people like would be in high demand, appreciated for their blessedness, sought after to pass on the blessed insights that they've received that others might participate as well. But sadly, contrary to all reason and common to our experience, we find exactly the opposite is true. The poor, the hungry, the weeping, they evoke not the appreciation of the world, not the admiration of the world, they don't even evoke the sympathy of the world, rather the true disciples of Jesus Christ, they arouse the persecution of the world.

Let's take a closer look at this reaction of persecution. In fact, you don't have an outline written in your bulletin because I just refused to give one this week. So you're going to get one now. Number one, the reaction of persecution. Just write that down, the reaction of persecution. And that's in verse 22.

"Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil." That is the reaction of a persecuting heart.

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Now this hostile reaction of the unbelieving world, whether we're talking about religious persecution or irreligious persecution from unbelievers, their reaction has internal and external elements. That is to say, they possess an internal hatred all the time. And in some, that lies dormant. When it's awakened and aroused, it becomes an active despising, a loathing. And if pressed, that hatred comes out in external actions. That is, the exclusion, the reviling, the comprehensive spurning. And basically, you can see there three different levels of hostile reaction to the poor, the hungry, the weeping of the world. But the reaction begins in the heart, begins in the heart. And it comes to the outside in gradations or levels of persecuting behavior. That's what we see there.

First, let's talk about the heart, that internal motive. The word translated, hate, it's the word *miseo*, which means, to detest. It means to abhor. It can be expressed in sometimes a cold indifference, but when there's continued contact with what is hated, it becomes despising. It becomes abhorrence, animosity, vitriol. Why is that? It's because the heart of an unbeliever is fundamentally and morally at enmity with God. That's why. The life of the true believer, then, is a constant

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reminder to them that they are at enmity with God, that they're at war with God. And they have antipathy toward God. It's set deep within their heart, deep within their nature and they cannot escape it unless God is gracious to cause them to be born again.

Romans 8:7-8 says, "The mind that's set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot." The word, hostile, there is the word, enmity, and it speaks of a deeply seated hatred toward God. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God because that's what's in their hearts. So when they come across those who are pursuing a lifestyle of pleasing God, it draws out their enmity. They react with anger and hatred.

The Apostle John, in his typical way, he draws the dividing line a black-and-white, antithetical way of saying it, 1 John 3:10. He says this, "By this it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil." Just two categories there of humanity: children of God, children of the devil. There

is no in-between. There's no neutral ground. You're either one or the other.

And this is how he helps us to identify them, "Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother." Then he skips down to verse 12. "We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's, righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you." We see that lesson right in the original narrative in Genesis chapter 4.

Jesus Christ has become the most clear dividing line of all humanity. Those on his side are the children of God. And those who are not on his side are the children of the devil. That is to say they are the world. The children of the devil hate those who practice righteousness. That's the motive. That's the internal attitude.

Make no mistake, every unbeliever, every child of the devil, every person who is not of Christ, whether they actively oppose

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Christ and verbalize their opposition to Christ in an anti-Christian sentiment, or whether they profess Christ, but in their deeds, they deny him, they are of the same stripe. That's the same animal. Every unbeliever possesses this hatred toward God. They possess this antipathy toward God. We would not, we would like to believe that it's not us that they hate, but God. And we're just representatives and we kind of get the fallout of their hatred toward God.

That's not what the Bible says. If you're a Christian, unbelievers hate your God, yes, and they will hate you, too. They don't just hate the God you represent, but they hate you because you've been united to God in Christ. In fact, just listen to what Jesus said about that. He wrote in, or he said. It's written in John 15:18-20. "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore, the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours."

That's John 10, right? "My sheep hear my voice, I know them, they follow me." Those who do not obey the voice of the shepherd even if they claim to belong to his fold, if they do not obey the voice of the shepherd, then they are not of his sheep. And like the goats that they are, they will harbor enmity and hatred toward the shepherd and the sheep because they're not reconciled to God. Their hearts have not been changed. And so all that's in their heart is hatred, and lies, and murder, and deception.

Now, God, in his grace, restrains them. They're not as bad as they could be. But that's his grace. It's not because of them. If he were to lift his hand of restraint, which he will do at the very end, out will come the hatred. Let's look at some of that hatred expressed in external reactions, which are evident in the behaviors you can see. You are able to see this yourself looking around, experiencing this as you interact with other people.

Sometimes these external reactions are subtle, other times they're more overt. Jesus said, verse 22, "Blessed are you when

people hate you." And then this, "And when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil." Look at the first external reaction. It's to exclude. And the verb there is *aphorizo*, which has to do with separation. It has to do with pushing someone outside of a prescribed boundary. It has the idea, really, in a Jewish context, of excommunication.

In a Jewish context, excommunication from the synagogue was a very serious issue. The commentator Alfred Plummer says this, he says quote, "The usual sentence was for thirty days, during which the excommunicated might not come within four cubits of anyone." End quote. That is serious, isn't it? Thirty days of being treated like a leper, ousted from the synagogue, no social intercourse with friends and family, not even physical contact with other people. And if that offending behavior persisted, that thirty-day sentence could be extended to a permanent excommunication.

That was extremely severe, this permanent excommunication because it prohibited the whole community from practicing trade with that person. There's no buying, no selling, there's no

inviting them over to family gatherings. Religiously, that meant no synagogue attendance. That also meant, by the way, no temple sacrifice. Those people were pushed out of the community of God. Very severe.

That's the Jewish background of the word, but as we've noted, Luke is here writing for a Gentile audience. They're not all synagogue attenders, so how do they take this? This isn't ex, synagogue excommunication per se, it's rather for them being pushed out of society altogether. Really, the same thing, just in a Gentile context. It's marginalization. It's ostracizing. It's turning away from them, making that person a pariah, which is essentially the same thing.

In a Gentile context, you could start with people pulling away from them. Like, Oh, I know that person. Just stay away and don't bring up religion. Pulling away, no longer interacting, perhaps start, start to shun that person, maybe even shame them for their views, for their, their convictions. It could be subtle at first, but then in a Gentile context, as the consensus grows among the members of the community, the social reaction

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would become a matter of agreed upon policy, whether informally or in, or formally, pushing that person out to the, the margins of society, pushing them outside of the community. And it's effectively the same as Jewish excommunication, just a little less formal.

We're finding that happening with increasing regularity in our own day, aren't we? As Christians are increasingly marginalized, even excluded from certain jobs, some positions in the government, in politics certainly, especially in the corporate world. They're no longer available to those who hold or voice Christian convictions.

Maybe some of you have heard Albert Mohler's daily briefing, the one dated June 19th. He talked about Tim Farron. He's the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party; or he was the leader, I should say, of the Liberal Democratic Party in the United Kingdom. And as a professing evangelical, Mr. Farron, he'd been trying to straddle the fence with his own political party. He believed that he could be an evangelical Christian holding private beliefs about marriage and homosexuality and abortion, while

publicly advocating for the positions of his party, which, by the way, are decidedly and aggressively anti-Christian and opposed to everything he says he believes privately.

He tried to forge what he believes was a, a virtuous high road for a public servant, keeping his private views private, serving the public as a public servant according to their wishes. Mr. Farron's own party, though, exposed his inconsistency. First, by outing his evangelical beliefs and then by ridiculing them altogether and then ousting him. They don't want even a hint of Christian conviction anywhere near their politics.

That is becoming standard practice and not just in the UK in Europe, but here in the United States as well. Politics is the secular religion, which they see has crossed purposes with Christianity and in many cases, they're right. So Christians are increasingly excluded from public engagement. They're pushed to the margins, pushed to the fringes of society where they and their moral convictions don't have to be reckoned with any longer.

Look at the next word in the ESV text. It's the external reaction of reviling, reviling. It's the word *oneidizo*. It's, it, this goes beyond marginalization, which can take place without any confrontation, without anything voiced. But this word graduates the hatred to a verbal reproach. This is when it becomes verbal. The word *oneidizo* means to, to find fault with someone, but to do it in a demeaning way. It's a critical spirit that wants to pick at, point out, and highlight anything that they find distasteful. This is where the hatred and the despising comes out in very ugly words, evil speech, maligning.

One lexicographer says the terms have a wide range of meaning, quote, "from simple reproach to cursing and blaspheming with invective mockery, affront, insult, and abuse included in between." The word, the word pictures language that's as deadly as a viper's poison. Psalm 57 verse 4 says, their "teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords." That's the picture. Proverbs 30:14, very similar. These "are those whose teeth are swords, whose fangs are knives, to devour the poor from off the earth and the needy from among mankind." That is to say they just chew them up, they tear them like wolves tear a sheep.

If you've ever had someone angry at you for Christian conviction, for adhering to Biblical principle, you know exactly what this is like. Words come out of the mouth with just, just seething with rage. And they'd murder you if they could. If they weren't such good, upright, law-abiding citizens. But since they're better people than that, they refrain from using their hands to murder you and they attempt to do so with their tongues. They want to slay you with their vitriolic language.

The final word there, it's the word the reaction of spurning. "Spurning your name as evil." This is a very interesting expression especially the way the translators have chosen to render it. And it's a good, it's a good translation. It's the word *ekballo*, which, which means, to cast out, to, to drive out, throw out, to expel. It's the word commonly used in the New Testament for, exorcism. *Ekballo* is what describes what Jesus did when he cast out demons. So think of yourself in this context and you're being exorcized like a demon from society. You're being cast out. That's the idea.

The word was also used in the secular context. We find it in Plato and other classical writers referring to, to hissing an actor off the stage, driving that person away with utter contempt because you hated what he represented. Notice how the word, though, is translated, what, what it is that's cast out, what it is that's driven away or expelled. In verse 22, it's translated as, spurn, it is, cast out, throw away, drive away. "Spurn your name as evil."

The word there, for evil, refers to what's worthless, totally useless. And what's interesting is the translation leads us to believe on first glance that it's our own names that are treated with contempt. In the Greek text, though, it says, Jesus says this, "Blessed are you when people spurn the name," singular, "of you all," plural, "as evil," worthless, totally useless. That is to say, to spurn the name singular, by which you all are known. What is that talking about? Jesus is talking about the name by which we are all known as Christians. A name that we take on because of his identity.

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In Jesus' day, the Jews used the term, Nazarene, to heap scorn on the followers of Jesus. And that's because Jesus came from the insignificant village of Nazareth and yet in their minds he pretended to be the Messiah. So it was laughable that some pretended Messiah would come from a little podunk town like Nazareth. Who does he think he is? Especially because this Jesus was crucified. He was hung on a cross. By the way, "Cursed is everyone who's hanged on a tree." And that, to them, meant that he could not have been the Messiah. Guess they failed to read Isaiah 53. Because he was crucified, they counted him a failure. They counted him as one to be scorned just as like Isaiah 53 says. Just in their minds, a stupid Nazarene. And those who followed him, they're even worse. A bunch of dumb hicks from Galilee, a bunch of Nazarenes.

In Paul's day before Christ confronted him on the Damascus Road and saved him, he was chasing around and persecuting followers of The Way, and that became a derogatory term for Christians. Even the name Christian, itself, which is a plural diminutive form of the word Christ. It means, little Christ. That was used to scoff and mock those who identified with the crucified Christ, those who claimed he was risen from the dead, the

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Messiah, the Savior, the Lord. Little Christs, fools. That was the name. We take that name proudly, don't we? But they want to cast it out. They want to get rid of it. They want to exorcize it from their society as something evil.

So this internal hatred has produced first exclusion and ostracizing. Then verbal approach, then and slander and maligning and finally, they identify the real source of their hatred, which is the name of Christ. And anything he's associated with, anybody who's associated with him. And as James 2:7, they begin to "blaspheme the honorable name by which you are called," and they persecute you as a whole group. Your pursuit of righteousness, your steadfast conviction of the truth, instead of seeing those things as virtues, they persecute them as evil.

As Jesus said, Matthew 10:22 and 25, "You will be hated by all for my name's sake. If they have called the, the master of the house," he's referring to himself. "If they call the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household?" That's what they're doing to us today, right? Same

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thing. Instead of recognizing our actions as loving, they accuse us of promoting hatred. Instead of appreciating our commitment to purity, and virtue, and wholesomeness, they hate us for what they see as an imposition and a restriction of their erotic pursuits.

Beloved, I know of people in our midst in this church here today right now, one dear couple in particular, they've suffered. They've suffered significantly for their Christian convictions. They've resisted family pressures to embrace the LGBTQ agenda. And they've been turned on, hated, marginalized, verbally abused and the name of the one they represent has been spurned as evil. They stand firm in the face of all that constant hostility. Why? Because they love the Son of Man more than they love the acceptance of family.

As a church, have a heart. We need to have a heart for one another. That's going to become increasingly frequent folks. It's going to become the norm. And if you haven't faced it yet, this kind of spurning and hostility, vitriol, you will. We pray to God you won't compromise. The elders pray that you won't

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compromise, that you will not succumb to the pressure, that you will not be silent when you should speak. Our Lord spoke haunting words when he said in Matthew 10:33, "Whoever denies me before men I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven."

There's almost no greater pressure to compromise than in the presence of unbelieving family or family members who are professing but compromising, disobedient Christians. Look, may God give us all the strength. May we surround those who, who fail and strengthen them. And may we especially surround those who are experiencing this kind of despising as they stand firm. May we surround them with Christian love and affection. May we demonstrate to one another that we belong, truly belong to a new family. Where our earthly families reject us and despise us, forsake us, may be, may we be like Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress*, who run to that Wicket Gate leaving everything behind.

Listen, beloved, as Christians, we need to expect this hatred from the unbelieving world. Notice in the verse there twice that little subordinate conjunction, when, when. That is to say, it's not if people hate you, etcetera but, when, they do. That is to

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say in this world Christians will be hated. Period. And at times, they will be persecuted as well. That's the reaction of the ungodly to the godly, persecution, hatred.

Paul told Timothy, 2 Timothy 3:12 and 13, "Indeed all," who live, "who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted while evil people and imposters." Imposters, who's that? Those who call themselves Christians, but don't obey Christ. "While evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." Look the world is going in entirely one direction; the saints are going in the opposite direction. And where their paths cross, there's friction. There's this unbridled sinful world is going to persecute the citizens of heaven.

To that point, John Calvin says this, "It is no doubt monstrous and unnatural that men who study to live a righteous life should be attacked and tormented in a way in which they do not deserve. Yet in consequence of the unbridled wickedness of the world, it too frequently happens that good men through a zeal of righteousness will arouse against them the resentments of the

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ungodly. Above all it is, as we must say, the ordinary lot of Christians to be hated by the majority of men. For the flesh cannot endure the doctrine of the Gospel, none can endure to have their vices reprov'd. For every Abel, there is a Cain. And for every Moses, there is a Korah, for every David, a Saul. For every saint before or since, there is a tormenting sinner or two or three or a multitude."

Paul descried his persecutors in Ephesus as "wild beasts," vicious and bloodthirsty. At Corinth, Paul's chief opposition in that church was a like a thorn in his flesh, always pricking him and tormenting him, always working to undermine everything he was trying to build up. As Christians, look that's our lot. We're despised and rejected by the world.

Paul reminds us, Romans 8:36, "As it is written, 'For your sake, we are being killed all the day long; we're regarded as sheep to be slaughtered,'" by the world. For example, by believing in the Bible, they accuse us of blindly following a book that they believe promotes slavery. By practicing biblical roles in marriage, the husband leading and teaching, the wife submitting

and supporting, they accuse us of misogyny, of promoting male patriarchy that has historically abused women and continues to abuse women. By insisting on the biblical definition of marriage calling sexual immorality, sinful; homosexual immorality as a perversion, they slander us as promoting hate speech and inciting violence against those who practice those sins.

The world is growing increasingly hostile to Christianity and particularly in this country because God has handed our country over to its sins. And as we've said before, we're probably experiencing a brief reprieve but the hostility of the anti-Christian sentiment in this country, it will show itself again, and more forceful than ever.

The most zealous and harsh of true churches persecutors throughout all of human history, it's not the world, it's not the secularist, it's the religious persecutors. Because they think they have God on their side. That was the case in Jesus' day. They called him Beelzebul, because they thought of themselves to be on God's side and him on the devil's. That was

the case in the days of the apostles when the Jews persecuted the church and that has been the case throughout church history.

You can read about poor Athanasius, how he was chased, and harried, banished over his entire lifetime by the Arian majority that denied the deity of Christ. You read about the Roman Catholic Resurgence after the Protestant Reformation, the counter Reformation, that killed Christian after Christian. In fact, most of the martyrs that are catalogued in *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, you read through that, they're not put to death by the secular state; there are some, most of those persecuted by those who believed they're Christians, who thought themselves having the true Gospel. They professed Christ, but they long ago departed from the truth and they didn't even know it. The opinions of men had become their doctrine. They persecuted the true Christians who held to the Bible.

Listen, I believe we're to find that kind of persecution against the true church in our day as well. Very poorly taught so-called Christian's, many of them are false professors, not true Christians. They're going to gain the ascendancy in the culture.

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They're going to be popular with the culture. They've got more money, more influence, be, why? Because they preach a gospel that's popular to the culture, health, wealth, prosperity. Who doesn't want that?

It's a very popular message. So those people, I believe, are eventually going to join the anti-Christian culture in persecuting true believers. I've already heard it in pastors even in our area, in our city, who've preached messages to their congregations, hundreds and some of them thousands of people, basically promoting views that are contrary, directly contrary to what we teach even about evangelism. It's incredible.

This is Jesus' point, though. That when we are persecuted, we don't need to be afraid. In, in fact we need to rejoice. We need to rejoice in that day and leap for joy because those are the ones to whom God looks. Isaiah 66, verse 2, "Those who are humble and contrite in spirit and who tremble at God's word." In fact, just to show you that, I'd like you to turn quickly to that final chapter in Isaiah, Isaiah 66. This is just a fascinating illustration of the, the kind of religious hypocrisy

that turns from scoffing to persecuting and it's according to the pattern that Jesus describes here.

In Isaiah 66 the Lord is confronting and rebuking a religious majority in Israel. And the prophesy begins in verses 1 and 2. "Thus says the Lord, 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, where is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.'" That's the poor. That's the hungry. That's the weeping.

Unlike David and Solomon, they built the temple, they realized the infinite God is not contained within a temple made with hands. But unlike them, the Jews in Isaiah's day had forgotten that. They took great pride in their building. They believed the presence of the temple meant the favor of God, no matter how they lived, no matter what they believed, how they behaved. So in verse 3, look at it there in Isaiah 66. In God's eyes, their temple sacrifices had become an all, all-out abomination to him.

And in the original language, the, the language is stark and abrupt here. Here's how it reads, "He who sacrifices an ox, murderer. He who sacrifices a lamb," these are legitimate sacrifices, right? "So he who sacrifices a lamb, he who breaks a dog's neck." That's how God sees it. "He who offers a grain offering, is like offering pig's blood to God. He who burns incense is he who blesses an idol."

These are the sacrifices of the hypocritical people. They're just like the prayers of false professing Christians today, utterly abhorrent to the Lord God. So God here confronts their hypocrisy. He pronounces a coming judgment upon them from they will never escape. But at verse 5, the Lord turns his attention to his people. It's precious. He turns his attention to those who are in the minority, those seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal. They're persecuted, though, by the hypocritical majority of religionists who have won the day.

Look at verse 5, "Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at his word: Your brothers who hate you and cast you out for my name's sake have said, 'Let the Lord be glorified, that we may

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

see your joy'; but it is they who shall be put to shame." That's really the language of Christ's beatitude. These brothers so-called, they're brothers according to the flesh, they're brothers according to cultural religious ethnic heritage, but they actually hate those who tremble at God's word. They cast them out for his name's sake. The words with which they cast them out, though, they're dripping with hypocrisy.

In other words, they're saying, Oh, we just want God to be truly glorified. We just want people to hear the right story about God, about social justice, about equal rights for LGBTQ brothers and sisters in Christ. And we want you to repent of your bigotry, your hatemongering, because it's not a good testimony about God. He, God is love. Join us that we may see your joy.

Look, we're not far off from that, are we? More and more churches, as I said, are taking that approach to that issue. As they compromise and embrace sin, they're putting more and more pressure on faithful congregations. They call the convictions off-putting, the language unkind, the attitude unloving. These

GRACE CHURCH

compromising hypocrites are calling on the faithful to repent of sin, accusing them of mispresenting God.

Look, beloved, the most loving thing we can do for people who sin is to call it sin. The most loving thing we can do to people who are in a house on fire is to go in, wake them up and tell them, your house is on fire and it's going to burn down and you're going to die. We need to help people understand their sin, that they're in danger before a holy God. That is not unloving. That is the most loving thing you can do. You know, to these hypocrites, Jesus warns, "Woe to you when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets." That is to say, the compromisers are false prophets.

Turn back to Luke 6:22-23. Let's consider a second point here. Number two, the occasion for the persecution, the occasion for persecution. Read the verse again, "Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you, revile you, spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day and leap for joy." I've already drawn your attention to the occasion, which is indicated by the repetition of that subordinate

GRACE CHURCH

Greeley

conjunction, when, in verse 22. When, this happens but also notice in verse 23 Jesus called us to rejoice in that day.

It may come as somewhat of a relief to know that overt, external demonstrations of Christian persecution, it's not a constant. Otherwise, we would be not able to meet here, right? It's not a constant. It's, it's rather an occasional thing. Sometimes the fires are turned up. Sometimes the fires are turned down. It's all in God's sovereignty. "Blessed are you when persecution happens. Rejoice in that day when it comes." But I want to say this very quickly. The occasion of the persecution, it's not just any persecution, right? It's not just any persecution that counts. It's only the suffering we endure, verse 22, what? "On account of the Son of Man!" That's the only persecution that counts.

I used to work a long time ago for a family of Mormons. Very nice people, but sadly they lived under the delusion of a false assurance that they had produced for themselves out of their own works of piety. A number of them I talked with, witnessed to, they looked back to their time as a missionary, when they went

door-to-door for the sake of Joseph Smith's gospel. And every time they were rebuffed at the door, every time the door was closed on them or even if someone refused to go and an answer the door to them, they chalked that up as suffering persecution for the sake of the gospel.

That may have been persecution in a mild form, but it wasn't what Jesus is talking about here. Listen, Mormons don't suffer on account of the Son of Man. Their theology is hostile to the true Son of Man. It's only suffering on account of the Son of Man that we'll gain a reward with God. All the other so-called suffering is just vanity and conceit. Even a deception that people think by their suffering, by their persecutions, so-called, they're actually in the faith, they're actually in the truth. Look, you can just be plain cantankerous and get suffering for yourself, right? That's not any indication that where you are is a true position.

John Calvin spoke of some who suffered persecution for his own fault, and he said, quote, "He" that is this person suffering, "may not forthwith boast that he is a martyr of Christ as the

GRACE CHURCH

Donatists in ancient times, they were delighted with themselves on this single ground: that the magistrates were against them." That is to say, the fact that the law was chasing them down proved their cause. "And in our own day," says Calvin, "the Anabaptists, while they disturb the church by their ravings and slander the Gospel, they boast that they're carrying the banners of Christ when they are justly condemned. But Christ pronounces those only to be happy who are employed in defending a righteous cause." End quote.

That's exactly right. We could add to what Calvin said there by saying that it's those who are persecuted for defending a righteous cause, but also those who are persecuted for living in a righteous way. When we do so for the sake of Christ, that's what makes us recipients of this promise. We'll illustrate that to you by having you turn over to 1 Peter. 1 Peter is a letter written to a church in suffering. And let's face it, Peter himself, he had no love of suffering.

In fact, he tried to talk Jesus out of suffering on a number of occasions and Jesus once turned to him to rebuke him and said,

GRACE CHURCH

Greeley

"Get, get behind me, Satan," you want to protect me from, from suffering? You don't have in interest the things of God, but the things of man. Peter didn't love suffering, but he learned to appreciate it.

In his first epistle, he's constantly calling Christians who embrace suffering. I'm going to resist the temptation to read the entire epistle to you. I should, though. But let's start in 1 Peter 2, verse 18, verse 18. "Servants be," submissive to your masters or, "subject to your masters with all respect not only to the good and gentle, but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if," when you endure, "when you sin and are beaten for it you endure. But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps."

Turn the page over to 1 Peter 3, verse 9. "Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless. For

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing." Where do you think he's getting that? From Christ, right? "For whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil, his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous," their, "his ears are open to their prayer. The face of the Lord is against those who do evil. Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed."

It's interesting there. It says, "When you're hated, when you're excluded, when you're reviled, spurned on account of the Son of Man. In that day rejoice." Most of the time, Peter says, there is no one who will harm you if you prove zealous for doing what is good, but even if the opportunity comes, that suffering comes, and is attendant to your righteousness for the sake of Christ, you will be blessed. All of this is alluding back to what Jesus taught on this occasion in the Sermon on the Mount.

As we grow in, there's another passage. Just jot this down. I won't read it for the sake of time, but 1 Peter 4:12-16.

Actually, I'm going to read it. "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share in Christ's sufferings, that you also may rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you're insulted for the name of Christ, you're blessed," why? "because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name."

What a great passage. Sharing sufferings of Christ, insulted for the name of Christ. Suffering as a Christian, that's the only suffering that counts and the more we become like our Lord, the more we speak like him, the more we act like him, not hiding our little light under a bushel, no. But letting it shine, letting our little light shine forth proclaiming the truth, exposing the evil works of darkness just as our Lord did, well, the more we're going to be reproached like our Lord. And when that comes, we rejoice.

I need to emphasize this point, beloved, just quickly. If your life is without persecution, take heed to Jesus' warning in Luke 6, "Woe to you when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets." That is to say, beware if everyone likes you. Beware if everyone thinks you're a nice guy or a really nice lady. Beware if you've been living your life to avoid conflict altogether because that is not Christianity.

If you truly live according to the Sermon on the Mount, you will face persecution. Again, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, not might be, but they will be. But don't worry. Don't be anxious. And never be afraid because when we are persecuted on account of the Son of Man, we can rejoice to be counted worthy of suffering for the sake of the Son of Man.

It brings us to a final, most glorious point for this morning, the rewards of persecution. Number three: the rewards of persecution. Look at verse 23. Jesus says, "Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward in heaven is great and

so their fathers did to the prophets.” Rejoice, is the verb *chairō*. It refers to a deep and abiding joy, internal happiness that need not be affected by our circumstance. This is a joy that can endure even in the harshest of conditions and the most trying of situations.

That next command there, leap for joy, that’s a single word in the Greek, *skirtao*; refers to an outward demonstrable action, this, like internal exuberance that is expressed in leaping and skipping around. I’m not going to demonstrate it, but it is there in the text. Malachi 4:2 uses this word in the Septuagint. “For you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. And you shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.” I know some of you have seen newborn calves leaping. As they get their legs underneath them, they’re filled with energy, and they’re just filled with joy of life. That’s a great picture, just skipping about, jumping for joy of being alive.

Remember the apostles, persecuted by the Jewish leaders, Acts chapter 5, verse 40. The leaders of the Sanhedrin called them

GRACE CHURCH

Greeley

the apostles, they beat them, which, honestly, to within an inch of their life, flesh falling off of them. "They beat them, charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus and then let them go." Then this amazing reaction from the apostles. "They left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that Christ, the Christ is Jesus."

Paul and Silas, locked up in a dank Philippian jail, says in Acts 16:25, "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God." And Ren Merry, I think it was vibrant singing. I think it was vibrant. I think it's in the text. They were rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for the sake of Christ. That exuberance rises from thankful hearts to express loud songs of praise in the midst of despising.

And in spite of the persecution, we find great joy. We find undaunted courage. We find humble boldness. That's what Jesus has for us. It's what he commands us to do. This is the first beatitude, by the way, that contains commands. They're quite

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

interesting here. Both of them are aorist imperatives and this case here, it indicates a sense of urgency, as in: do this and do it now. It's like Jesus saying, do not hesitate at all to rejoice and leap for joy. If you suffer on account of the Son of Man, immediately rejoice, leap for joy. Or in other words, don't bemoan your station.

You've been bestowed with a great honor, counted worthy to suffer for the sake of the name. So how unfitting it is to get depressed, to become sad, to mope about as if "something strange were happening to you," as Peter says. You've just resembled Christ in your speech, your behavior; you've resembled Christ in such a degree that, that you've invoked a reaction from the unbelieving Godless world and that is awesome.

So rejoice. Leap for joy. You say, I don't know, you must be of stronger stuff than me because I cannot produce that kind of reaction in myself. I'm not, and I understand that perfectly. When a family member, when a close friend has been so close for much of our lives and when that person turns on us, ridicules

our faith, that's painful, isn't it? It hurts. It goes back to "Blessed are those who are weeping." We weep over that sin.

So how do we find it within ourselves to be happy about that? I've got very good news for you, and once again, it's tucked away in the grammar. Alright. The command to rejoice, it's an aorist imperative, which is commanding immediate obedience, but it's also in the passive voice, which means this joy is not self-produced. This is a joy that comes by the Holy Spirit. It's a virtue that he produces in you.

In fact, if I'm remembering Galatians 5:22 in the fruit of the Spirit list, I think that's the second one, right? The fruit of the Spirit is what? Love and then what? Joy. It's a fruit of the Spirit. It comes forth from your life. It's not human produced. So if you don't find it within yourself to find joy in this persecution, that's true. That's right.

Paul says elsewhere, Romans 5:3-5, that by the Holy Spirit "We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, character produces

GRACE CHURCH

Greeley

hope," and all of that comes to us because we are Christians. Verse 5, "Because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." And if he's there, you know what, joy's going to be there and joy in the midst of persecution.

So you're right when you're suffering the pain of hatred, despising for the sake of Christ, when you are excluded, reviled, spurned on account of Christ, for your commitment to righteousness, you have no ability to produce joy. It was never in you in the first place. That kind of joy is Spirit-produced. It is God-wrought. So revolve, resolve yourself to obey the command. As you resolve yourself to obey the command to rejoice and leap for joy, you know what? God is going to visit you immediately with the grace to rejoice in that hour.

They used to speak in church history of those who would suffer the flames of martyrdom and as they're lighting the matches, the flames come up and start burning their skin in what must have just been absolute torment, singing would come out from the flames. And the, the church historians used to call that a

martyr's grace that God gave for the moment to cause them to live beyond the suffering, beyond the pain.

The ultimate reward for suffering persecution, verse 23 is this, look at it there, it says, "For behold your reward is great in heaven." There is also an immediate reward for suffering persecution. "For so their fathers did to the prophets." That gives you a certain assurance. There are precious rewards wrapped up in that, those explanations, which Jesus gives.

So what are those rewards? What are they all? I'd love to tell you now, but we're going to have to wait until next time. Sorry about that, but it will keep you coming back. Alright? And you'll be glad we waited because we do not want to rush through this part. For now, let's bow together in prayer.

I want to thank you, Father, for calling us to be your people. I want to thank you for uniting us to Christ. And that the Holy Spirit is resident within us, that even during times like this of persecution from those who hate you, that you will supply us with all grace. We want to thank you that we can be so counted

GRACE CHURCH

with Christ that we would be counted worthy to suffer for his name. And most of us, if not every single one of us in this room, we have a hard time imagining ourselves responding like the apostles did leaving the Sanhedrin, beaten and bloodied and torn and rejoicing because they were counted worthy to suffer for the name. Oh, but Father, we know that you will strengthen us in the, the evil day.