

Blessed and Persecuted

As we arrive at the conclusion of this 9-week study of the Beatitudes, there are some questions that you might now be able to answer.

Q.1 What ARE the Beatitudes?

Two answers!

A.1 "The introduction to the Sermon on the Mount."

A.2 A list of identifying marks of a genuine follower of Christ and a corresponding list of the benefits of being one.

Q.2 What are the Beatitudes ABOUT?

Again, two answers!

A.1 "Just one thing. The kingdom of God" →Verses 3 and 10

A.2 "Two things really. The kingdom of God AND the righteousness of God" →Verses 6 and 10

As we wrap up this study today, let's do a reading of the Beatitudes "in context," with all of you reading the list of BENEFITS (Printed in capital letters). I'll call you to stand as we get to your part.

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. **Matthew 4:17-25**

Time to stand! Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

He begins by speaking directly to the crowds, explaining to them two things:

IDENTIFYING MARKS OF A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST AND THE BENEFITS OF BEING ONE

Blessed are the poor in spirit, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

Blessed are those who mourn, FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED.

Blessed are the meek, FOR THEY SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, FOR THEY SHALL BE SATISFIED.

N.B. To this point, each of the identifying marks were more-or-less *unattractive, unappealing and incomprehensible* character traits. But then, we get to the second half: *almost universally admired* character traits.

Blessed are the merciful, FOR THEY SHALL RECEIVE MERCY.

Blessed are the pure in heart, FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD.

Blessed are the peacemakers, FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF GOD.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. **Matthew 5:1-10**

→ Another question we can answer:

Q.3 What did the crowd think of the disciples? (Unappealing... Admirable... Persecute!)

This is a relevant question for us! Just coming off the **Annual Meeting** with its strong emphasis on "*city ministries*"

The answer will be: **THIS SERMON IN ONE SENTENCE:** Real followers of Christ should expect _____.

A very small line for the answer?

MULTIPLE CHOICE:

Firstly, from the concluding Beatitude (**vs.10**):

a) **persecution from the crowd** A case can be made for this answer! When Jesus finished declaring the Beatitudes, he looked away from the crowds and looked directly at his disciples and said to **them**: **Blessed are you** when others revile **you** and persecute **you** and utter all kinds of evil against **you** falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before **you**.

Matthew 5:11-12

A biblical idea. The book of **Acts** shows us how it can be for followers of Christ. How *difficult* it can be!

And as they [The apostles] were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. **Acts 4:1,2** "Greatly annoyed"

But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. **Acts 5:17,18** *Persecution began promptly!*

But... **THIS SERMON IN ONE SENTENCE:** Real followers of Christ should expect _____.

MULTIPLE CHOICE:

a) persecution from the crowd

b) the admiration of the crowd

A case can ALSO be made for THIS expectation: ... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. **Matthew 5:16**

This is ALSO a biblical idea!

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they (The whole church) received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having **favor with all the people** **Acts 2:46**

Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in **high esteem**. **Acts 5:12,13**

Plainly, the crowd was DIVIDED ON THE QUESTION of what to think of the Christians. Hm? Which of the two is "normal"? Which of these two expectations should we expect? The two of them can be generalized:

Hm...? **THIS SERMON IN ONE SENTENCE:** Real followers of Christ should expect _____.

MULTIPLE CHOICE:

a) persecution from the crowd

b) the admiration of the crowd

c) to be noticed by the crowd

This is the expectation that the Lord himself sets out in the Sermon on the Mount. One of them, anyway. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they **may** see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 5:14-16

If we get this right, "they" MAY see our good works and they MAY glorify our Father who is in heaven. But some of them, emerging from the crowd, and sometimes leading the crowd, will see us differently, and hate us for our righteousness. Crowds are like this!

At the time of the American War of Independence: the population of the 13 colonies: 2 ½ million [The white population]

Of that crowd, 40-45% → patriots ["Give me liberty or give me death!" Patrick Henry]

Of that crowd, 15-20% → loyalists [As many as 500,000 colonists → but only 80,000 left the colonies. UEL. Just 3%!]

Q. But of the crowd, what about the others? The other "50%"? A. Not enough of an opinion to do anything either way!

The title of this series has been **COSTS AND BENEFITS**. To this point, the COSTS have only been implied by the context (**Matthew 4** and **9**): but here, as a final note, the COSTS are pointed at much more plainly.

Our text this morning: **Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake** **Matthew 5:10**

The COSTS are implied in **the Lord's words**: "*Follow me.*" It takes the whole of the **Gospel of Matthew** to get the whole picture of the cost of following Christ.

e.g. → ... whoever does not **take his cross** and follow me is not worthy of me. **Matthew 10:38**

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and **take up his cross** and follow me. **Matthew 16:24**

THIS SERMON IN ONE SENTENCE: Real followers of Christ should expect _____.

MULTIPLE CHOICE:

d) a cross of their own to carry

THIS SERMON IN ONE SENTENCE: Real followers of Christ should expect d.

THIS SERMON IN ONE SENTENCE: Real followers of Christ should expect a cross of their own to carry.

Q.4 **What does it mean to carry your cross?** (What did it mean for Jesus? He's the One we're following!)

A.1 "Your cross" means what it costs you to follow Christ. Everything involved in obeying God as Christ did.

A.2 "Your cross" means shame and pain and death.

BUT LET US NOT BE SAD. "**The blood of the martyrs is seed.**" (Tertullian, about 200 A.D.) As the Lord wills (and in answer to our fervent prayers), **we should expect** people to emerge from the crowd and join us in following Christ, as we have followed the disciples of Christ before us. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And **the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved**. **Acts 2:46,47**

So let us live to be noticed as the followers of Christ, and let us trust God to shine his light [his righteousness] through us to the people who he is pleased to draw to himself. Let us live, and let us "do church," with the words of Jesus directing us in our understanding of what we are here for. He said, **You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father** who is in heaven. **Matthew 5:14-16**

THIS is what we are here for. To make known the greatness of God *by the lives we live, by the love we show and by the work (of the gospel) we share*.

NEXT: Four sermons for Easter: **The Cost of Grace** Beginning March 25

Matthew 17, 21, 26-28

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