



The Good Life
Life is Good When You're Hated
Matthew 5:10–12

“¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:10–12).

To the ears of a first-century Jewish audience, a pronouncement of blessings by a rabbi concerning what constituted the ‘good life’ would have been commonplace. By the time Jesus comes along, this had become a long-standing, well-developed rabbinical tradition in Judaism (see Wisdom of Ben Sira 25:7-9). So, when rabbi Jesus sits down on a mountainside in the region of Galilee to teach about the nature and ethics of the kingdom of heaven, it is no surprise to any Israelite listening that he starts off with a list of ‘beatitudes’. The shock comes, however, as Jesus reveals the upside-down nature of his list and those to whom the king of heaven announces, “*Blessed are you!*”

- During The Good Life sermon series, which beatitude has resonated with you the most? Which beatitude has been the most challenging for you to hear and process?

- Share with the group what God has been teaching you through The Good Life sermon series. How has this series encouraged you to grow deeper in your walk with Jesus?
- What have you learned about Jesus himself and his kingdom during this sermon series?

Structure and Arrangement of the Beatitudes

When we read Matthew 5:10-12, one of the first things that typically stands out about these verses is the fact that the word '*blessing*' appears twice. Careful readers also notice that both the phrase '*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*' and the word '*righteousness*' make their second appearance in the Beatitudes. These observations often raise several questions regarding the total number of Beatitudes, their overall structure and organizational arrangement, and whether they were intended to be interpreted as individual statements or as a collective. As we close out our sermon series on the Beatitudes, let's take some time to reflect on the number, arrangement, and intent of the Beatitudes as a whole.

- Do you think verses 10-12 consist of one beatitude or two? Expanding out to the group as a whole, would you say there are eight total beatitudes or nine? Are there any indicators within verses 5:3-12 that might help us answer these questions?
- What phrase binds the first and last Beatitudes, creating a collective of eight beatitudes?
- What word divides the eight Beatitudes into two parallel sets of four blessings?
- Reflect back on who Jesus is addressing in the Sermon on the Mount (hint: see Matthew chapter 4). Based on his audience, can you discern a common flow of thought moving from the first beatitude to the last using the word '*righteousness*' as a guide?

Persecuted for righteousness' sake

Out of all the beatitudes Jesus lists, maybe the most surprising comes last! One commentary writes, "All the Beatitudes (of Matthew 5) upset human calculations, but this one more than most." As such, the last and final Beatitude is so radical that Jesus feels the need to offer several explainers to his listeners in verses 11 & 12.

- Persecution is a scary word. What emotions and ideas does this word evoke in us?

- A modernized expression to conceptualize the biblical term ‘righteousness’ is to say someone ‘*did right by*’ another person. What is the thought or meaning behind this expression?
- According to the Scriptures, how is God the ultimate standard of righteousness?
 - What does it look like in the Beatitudes for God to ‘*do right by*’ humans?
 - What does it look like, according to the Beatitudes, for us as followers of Jesus to reflect this standard?
- Can you think of any historical or modern-day examples of Christians enduring persecution for attempting to ‘do right’ on Jesus’ account?
- According to verse 11, what gives Christian righteousness its distinct character?

It is at this point that a fair set of questions often gets raised. As Christians, why should we expect persecution? If we seek to demonstrate our love and devotion to Jesus by living morally pure lives all the while extending mercy to others and striving to foster peace and justice in our communities at large, then why would the world hate us for this? These hardly seem like things that warrant fervent ridicule from those outside our faith community.

- This teaching of Jesus becomes even more challenging when we realize this is not a one-off teaching of his. Reflect on the verses below. What insights do these passages offer on the topic Christian persecution?
 - John 3:19–21
 - John 15:18–19
 - John 7:7
 - Matthew 10:16–22

An Example and A Promise

Considering the uneasy implications of the final beatitude, Jesus offers both an example and an additional promise to his disciples in verse 12. Jesus draws his Jewish listeners back to the storyline of the Old Testament, more specifically the stories the prophets. He wants them to remember that faithful obedience to the will and purposes of the kingdom of God has always come at a steep price.

- Who were the prophets of the OT and what was their role in the nation of Israel?
- Collectively, why did the OT prophets endure persecution and from whom? List some examples/stories from the OT of prophets enduring persecution.
- In the immediate context of Matthew 5, Jesus shares this beatitude knowing most of his audience knew of John the Baptist and why he had been recently imprisoned. Why had the most recent prophet of Israel endured persecution and what would eventually be his fate?

- In our context, what can/does persecution look like for us?
- How can we have our mindset be one of gladness and joy when enduring trials and persecution for following Jesus?
- Read 2 Corinthians. 4:17–18. Reflect on the idea of earthly vs heavenly rewards.

In Matthew 4, we learn the make-up of the crowds addressed by Jesus in the Beatitudes. While they include fishermen like Peter and his brother Andrew, the crowds also included the marginalized of Jewish society—lepers, paralytics, the sick, and the demon-possessed. These people know the world to be cruel and hard having experienced great loss, physical death, and the powerlessness that comes with being caste down in their lowly circumstances. They are the poor, the mournful, and the meek who long for a world where justice is done and true peace reigns.

Then Jesus shows up. He doesn't look on their plight with detachment. Rather, he moves toward these marginalized peoples. He offers them healing and fills their hunger for righteousness by doing right by them. He extends the invitation of his kingdom to them and restores their hope in a better future, one in which God's kingdom rule reigns. Simultaneously, these words of Jesus serve as a gut-punch to those with power and status based on the kingdoms of this world.

As Jesus' disciples, as we follow him, as we listen to him and let him transform our whole way of seeing people, we will begin to engage the world as he does. We begin to live lives of moral purity, extending mercy to others and fostering peace in our communities. However, as we live for his name, the world will hate us for loving Jesus. But Jesus calls us to press on, knowing that our reward in heaven will far exceed any persecution we might endure on this earth. In summation, for Jesus, this is 'the good life'.