

Blessed Are the Despised, Part 1

Luke 6:22-23

I'm going to begin, as we have been accustomed to doing, by reading the beatitudes and we'll just read the beatitudes this 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, for 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.

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 whole 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. 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 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.

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. 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. 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, 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 and 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 reminder to them that they are 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.” You 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 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 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 behavior 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 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.

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 out, 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 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 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. You 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, and 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.

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 in, 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. He's just in their minds, a stupid Nazarene. And those who followed him, they're even worse, 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 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, says, 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 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 Beelzebub, how much more will they malign those of his household?" That's what they're doing to us today, right? Same 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 hated 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 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, they be, may we be like Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress*, who run for that Wicket Gate leaving everything behind.