

Blessed Are the Despised, Part 2

Luke 6:22-23

We're gonna 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, 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.'"

Paul told Timothy, 2 Timothy 3:12 and 13, "Indeed all, 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 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. 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 which 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 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. 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 compromising hypocrites are calling on the faithful to repent of sin, accusing them of misrepresenting 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 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 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.

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, "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 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 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.

1 Peter 4:12-16. "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, 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 *chairo*. 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 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." 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

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 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 with Christ that we would be counted worthy to suffer

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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.