

Sunday, September 9, 2018

Last week, we started looking into the Beatitudes, which are those statements of blessedness at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. There are two types of people on this earth – those who are children of God, and those who are children of the devil; those who are slaves to Satan and sin, and those who are slaves to God and righteousness; those who are subjects of the prince of the power of the air, and those who are subjects of the eternal King. The Beatitudes describe the characteristics of those people who are in the kingdom of heaven. Our aim should be to have and display all these characteristics, thereby making a clear line of demarcation between us and the world. To review, last week, we looked at the first four Beatitudes, and went over how they are related to one another and that there is a progression from the one to the next. It starts with being poor in spirit where I understand that I am totally depraved; I can contribute nothing to salvation, so I put away self-reliance and self-righteousness and rely completely on the Lord. This causes me to mourn for that state of sin that I'm in, and consequently causes me to be meek in the sight of the Lord, understanding that all things are according to His sovereign will and that I must therefore quietly and humbly submit to Him. This state of being causes me to hunger and thirst after righteousness, to seek the remedy. That's where we ended last week.

Now, some of you today may have your proverbial ox in the ditch after last week and are in a state of despair. You may have thoughts like, "I'm too evil to be saved" or "my sins are too bad to be forgiven." Let me say to you that it is a common experience among the people of God to have doubts from time to time for a variety of reasons, but when you question God's ability to save you, and you question whether it's true that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Romans 5:20), you have entered a very wicked and faithless place. You may not articulate it, but what you're saying is that the blood of Christ is not a sufficient payment – it's not good enough – it has to be added to. You are either accusing God of unfaithfulness and deceit by suggesting that He will not fulfill His promises, or you are accusing Him of lacking power so He cannot fulfill those promises. Let's review a small sampling of His promises on this topic, so you can be assured that when He promises, for example, that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will be filled, He means that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will, in fact, be filled.

"He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer." (Psalm 102:17)

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land." (Isaiah 1:18-19)

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for *that which is* not bread? and your labour for *that which* satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye *that which is* good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, *even* the sure mercies of David... Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” (Isaiah 55:1-3, 6-7)

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

“If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” (John 7:37-38)

“Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” (Hebrews 7:25)

So, this week, we will pick up where we left off last week.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy

Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” My assumption is that everyone here is going to have at least one of these Beatitudes that is particularly piercing, and the one that pierces me the most deeply is this one. I can take a couple approaches to that: 1. I can see how I stack up against how God says His children ought to be, recognize that I’m lacking, be humbled, and pray to Him, because the only help will come from Him; or 2. I can change what the verse means so I won’t feel uneasy about it. I like option #1. There’s no great mystery about what the verse means – if we aren’t merciful, then we aren’t blessed; if we aren’t merciful, then we aren’t giving evidence that we are God’s people; if we aren’t merciful, then we have no reason to expect that we will be going to heaven.

The first question is, what do we mean by being “merciful”? It means to have pity or compassion on someone who is in a wretched, suffering, poor condition. It isn’t just an emotion, but it also includes action. It’s not enough to just feel sorry for someone – an action needs to be taken to try to help relieve their suffering. It is helping someone where there is a

need. It is the opposite of being holier-than-thou, vindictive, spiteful. The greatest example of this is Christ dying on the cross for us to reconcile us, even while we were His enemies.

Our attitude should be that Christ had mercy on us when we didn't deserve it, so we should have mercy on others. If we've made it through the first four beatitudes – if we realize that we have no righteousness and can't obtain it on our own, if we mourn for our state of sin, if we are meek before God because we've seen ourselves for what we really are, and if we hunger and thirst after righteousness and God freely fills us - then we should be looking at other people differently than a worldly man would. We should see them as people who are ensnared by the devil and taken captive by him at his will (2 Timothy 2:26), and slaves of sin (John 8:34). We should see them as people who are in the same state that we would be in if it weren't for the mercy of God. These are people who ought to be pitied – God pitied you, so you ought to pity them; God helped you, so you ought to help them. And God did this when you were His enemy, so you should do this even when they are your enemy. I think we know that mercy ought to be our motivation in dealing with other people, and we give lip service to it, but we actually have to do it. If you've been forgiven, if you understand the mercy of God, this is how you ought to be. Remember Paul's attitude when he had almost persuaded Agrippa to be a Christian: "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds." (Acts 26:29). Like Paul in that situation, we don't know the secret will of God, and who He's determined to have mercy on, and who He's determined to harden. I've been primarily talking about our interactions with wicked people, but how much more should we be merciful to one another?

“Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took [him] by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So

likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.” (Matthew 18:23-35)

“For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.” (James 2:13)

Now, this does not mean that we are going to ignore what is going on around us, or have a “live and let live” mentality. It does not mean that we can cast away justice, holiness and righteousness under the banner of being “merciful.” We can’t enable someone in their sin – that is not mercy. We can’t throw away the holy standards of God just so we can be “nice” to someone – that is not mercy. We can’t tolerate and accept sin. God had mercy on you, but He never told you that your sins were OK, and you shouldn’t tell anyone that either. Mercy has to exist alongside with justice, holiness and righteousness, not at the expense of those things – otherwise, we’ve left mercy and entered a state of shameful sin.

So, practically speaking, from a spiritual standpoint, how are we to be merciful? We must preach, and we must pray. We must warn people of their sins, show them the consequences of those sins, and show them the remedy. We must pray for our enemies. But the key is that we must do all that with a merciful spirit – remember that these Beatitudes are primarily heart issues. What’s going on in your heart? While you’re telling people what the Bible says or praying, you should be remembering that God had mercy on you. If you look at a filthy, impudent sinner (even one who is your greatest enemy), it’s okay to look at him as he is – that is, a filthy, impudent sinner. But you can also look at him as a pitiful, fallen son of Adam, who is beguiled by Satan, and whose only hope is what you’re telling him. If you look at him that way also, it may change how you deal with him. And I understand how difficult that is to do sometimes. I’m not saying that you need to start being soft and weak. Remember, that the following standards still apply – being merciful doesn’t nullify anything:

“Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.” (Isaiah 58:1)

“And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling [them] out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.” (Jude 22-23)

This verse doesn’t mean that you need to be merciful to some people, and unmerciful to others. It simply means that some people need to be more tenderly and mercifully dealt with, and some more harshly dealt with – but it must still be done with an underlying spirit of mercy (note that the goal is “others save with fear”). You have only to look at how Christ and the apostles dealt with different types of people to see that different approaches may be

warranted for different people. We have a duty to make a distinction. Similarly, we have to walk this tightrope:

“Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.” (Matthew 7:5-6)

In other words, we have to clean up our own act before we can properly help a brother with his sin, and we have to be discerning enough to know when to stop giving the truth of God to a rebel who is only going to defile it.

Finally, what is the reward? “They shall obtain mercy.” If you are merciful, you will obtain mercy on the judgment day. If you are merciful, you will have more and more outpourings of God’s mercy even while you’re still on earth. Now this is one of the most misinterpreted of the Beatitudes. Not only is it used to justify and support sin under a false notion of what “mercy” is, but false doctrines of “works righteousness” have been built on top of this verse. The latter misinterpretation is this: if I have mercy on people, that is the condition on which God will have mercy on me; and the degree to which I have mercy on people will determine the degree to which God will have mercy on me. That is wrong. Not only would all people end up in hell if that was the standard (because nobody is perfectly merciful), but it would nullify the whole doctrine of grace. Grace and mercy are both unmerited – I don’t deserve them. If I receive mercy from God because I deserve it, then by definition, it is no longer mercy – it is something that is owed to me. What the passage means is that if God has saved us and forgiven us, then the evidence of that will be that we are merciful to others, and we are guaranteed to obtain mercy. On the other hand, if we are not merciful, we can’t claim to be saved.

It all starts off by God having mercy on us. Look at Paul. He “obtained mercy” (1 Timothy 1:16) while he was on the road to Damascus to show no mercy. Nobody can claim that Paul obtained mercy because he was being merciful. Peter said: “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (1 Peter 1:3). It starts with God. Once He has mercy on us, then we become merciful, we obtain more and more mercy in this life, and ultimately on the last day, mercy will triumph over judgment.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God

The characteristics of God’s people are that they are poor in spirit, mourn for their sins, are meek in the sight of God, so they hunger and thirst after righteousness, and have hence been

filled. God has had mercy on us. He was under no obligation to put our sin aside and impute His righteousness to us, but He had mercy on us. Because of that mercy that we received, we are merciful and will obtain more mercy, and we are pure in heart.

The Jews of Jesus's day were very concerned with outward appearance. They thought they could show everyone their great purity by their actions. But Jesus said, "No. It's purity of HEART that I'm looking for." A pure heart will lead to pure actions. Conduct is important, but only if your heart's right.

The first question is, what is the "heart" referring to here? Proverbs 4:23 says about the heart, "out of it are the issues of life." The "issues of life" are those things that proceed from the heart; those things that you think, do and say. The heart includes what you feel and what you will. Those things result in outward behavior – they come from the heart. And the heart is the core of all our problems. A wicked and corrupt heart leads to wicked actions. Jeremiah tells us that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). Jesus tells us that "those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are *the things* which defile a man." (Matthew 15:18-20). The problem of human beings is that we are rotten to the core. Our very hearts are corrupt. It's not our environment that is to blame for humans doing evil things – it is our evil heart. Our nature is to be contrary to God; to be at enmity with God.

And here we have Jesus telling us, "only when you are pure in heart can you see God." Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "*is any folly greater than the folly of imagining that you can ever make yourself a Christian?*" Folly, indeed. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." (Job 14:4). "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? *then* may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." (Jeremiah 13:23). We can no more make ourselves have pure hearts than an Ethiopian can change the color of his skin. What Christ is saying is, "before a person can see God, there has to have been a change to your very core." And that can only be done by God. Christ describes this elsewhere as "ye must be born again" and "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3:5,7). This is a work of God:

"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do *them*." (Ezekiel 36:25-27)

This doesn't mean that you get to remain passive. As I mentioned last time, you have a responsibility here. Just because you can't absolutely purify your own heart, that doesn't mean that you get to pursue sin and slog around in the pigsties of the world. God is the one working in us, but we're still told to mortify the deeds of the flesh.

“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse *your* hands, ye sinners; and purify *your* hearts, ye double minded.” (James 4:8)

The next question is, what does it mean to be “pure”? There are a couple things conveyed by the idea of “purity.” First, it means “without mixture” (like pure gold). The idea is singleness, sincerity, without hypocrisy, without deceit. Our single focus should be on God and His glory. Second, it means “free from the defilement of sin” or “clean.” It means that we are cleansed from the inside out. We started rotten down to the very core, and God cleansed us. He regenerated us. He gave us a new heart.

Remember what I said last time about justification and sanctification. Justification is that Christ has imputed His righteousness to us. Paul said that his greatest desire was to “win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” (Philippians 3:8-9). He did not have a righteousness of his own, but rather the righteousness that God gave him. That is justification. God takes His righteousness and credits it to your account. When God looks at you, He sees the pure heart of Christ.

Then there is sanctification, which means that my heart is changed. I have new desires, and a new will; I am a new man, so I live a new way. But I'm not sinless; the old man is still there. I struggle to become more and more pure in heart as I live on earth. Charles Spurgeon describes that like this: *“It was the custom of ancient tyrants, when they wished to put men to the most fearful punishments, to tie a dead body to them, placing the two back to back; and there was the living man, with a dead body closely strapped to him, rotting, putrid, corrupting, and this he must drag with him wherever he went. Now, this is just what the Christian has to do. He has within him the new life; he has a living and undying principle, which the Holy Spirit has put within him, but he feels that every day he has to drag about with him this dead body, this body of death, a thing as loathsome, as hideous, as abominable to his new life, as a dead stinking carcass would be to a living man.”* Our problem in this life is that our heart is not single – we have a war going on between the flesh and the spirit. Our heart is divided – our spirit wants to serve God, and our flesh wants to serve sin. We should have a single heart. Part of our sanctification is to do as David did and “set the Lord always before me” (Psalm 16:8). He said, “My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise.” (Psalm 57:7). We have to pray to God to unite our hearts, and to continue to clean our hearts:

**“Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name.”
(Psalm 86:11)**

“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10)

The promise here is that “they (and ONLY they) shall see God.” We see Him even now through the eye of faith. We see Him in His providence day by day, in history, in the creation, and most clearly in His Holy Word. It says about Moses that “he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.” (Hebrews 11:27). So it doesn’t simply mean to see Him with our eyes; it means to know Him, that He is near – “a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). But we will see Him face to face one day. Can there be any greater and more exciting thought? You get to enter into the King’s court and see him face to face! You are being prepared to meet the King. In your natural state, God can’t even look on you because you’re so evil (Habakkuk 1:13), but He has reconciled you “to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight.” (Colossians 1:22). If you have this hope, purify yourself, even as He is pure (1 John 3:3).

“For I know [that] my redeemer liveth, and [that] he shall stand at the latter [day] upon the earth: And [though] after my skin [worms] destroy this [body], yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; [though] my reins be consumed within me.” (Job 19:25-27)

“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” (1 Corinthians 13:12)

**“Follow peace with all *men*, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”
(Hebrews 12:14)**

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God

A person who has hungered and thirsted after righteousness and has been filled will be merciful, pure in heart, and a peacemaker. We hear a lot about “peace” in this world. It has defined it to be “absence of hostility, war, or fighting.” The United Nations was established at the end of World War II, and its Charter says that their purpose is “to maintain international peace and security.” They’ve done an amazing job there – since it was founded in 1945, there have been precisely 0 days of peace on earth.

The world doesn’t know what it’s doing. The Nobel Committee handed a Nobel Peace Prize out to Barack Obama, for example, even while he was Commander In Chief over one of the longest wars in US history, and presiding over the killing of 3000 unborn babies each day.

There's a lot of talk about peace, even while wars and violence rage on, but as long as men are at war with God, there will be no peace on earth. There will be no peace in their hearts, there will be no peace in their words, and there will be no peace in their behavior. What they really want is freedom from the standards of God – that's what they think will give them peace.

“The way of peace they know not; and *there is* no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace.” (Isaiah 59:8)

So, the peacemaker that we read about here in Matthew 5:9 is quite different than anything that the world would recognize. The job of a peacemaker is to establish peace...lasting peace. Not a temporary, superficial truce. Not a compromise. But real peace. Peace is not the absence of fighting – it is the presence of tranquility that can only be brought about by being reconciled with God. Our job is to be peacemakers – to tell people the only way to find real peace.

A peacemaker is not a cowardly person who just wants to avoid conflict. It is not a “peace at any price” person. It is not an appeaser. Peace is impossible to have at the expense of truth, purity, righteousness, and holiness. James tells us that the “wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable.” (James 3:17). There will be no peace without purity. A person who stores up envy, wrath, hatred and maliciousness in his heart cannot possibly be a peacemaker. Peace comes as a result of confronting sin, not from coddling sin. You must deal with your sin to have peace! This is why ecumenical and interfaith groups are so evil – they refuse to confront the problem (i.e., sin). They want to sit around and discuss what everyone has in common; they want to talk about what everyone already agrees with. This is not peace – everyone can agree on **something**! Jesus never sat down with the Pharisees and said, “look guys, let's put our differences aside and see if we can come to a consensus.”

When people look at us, the last word in the English language that they would use to describe us is “peacemakers.” They use lots of other words to describe us, but never “peacemaker.” They believe that the person who preaches about truth and purity and righteousness, and the one who confronts sin and heresy, is the problem – the one who does that is the one who is creating conflict and taking peace away, not the one that is making peace. Remember how Ahab addressed Elijah: “art thou he that troubleth Israel?” (1 Kings 18:17). And look at Jesus Christ – the Prince of Peace, the greatest Peacemaker the world has ever known, the One who gave His own life to reconcile His loved ones and bring them peace – this Jesus caused so much division and turmoil that they killed Him! No, the world will never see us as peacemakers, because we insist that peace can only exist on God's terms – not on the world's terms. Being reconciled with the God of Peace is the only way to have peace. You cannot demand peace from God if you are walking in disobedience and enmity to Him.

“And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

A peacemaker tells people how to be reconciled with God. And the reward of being a peacemaker? “They shall be called the children of God.” We are in the family of God now. We’ve been adopted. We are distinguished from those who are in Satan’s family (John 8:44). If we are His children, that means He is our Father. He provides for us. He protects us. He corrects us. He loves us. He saves us. He forgives us. He delights in us. He spares us. He has graven us on the palms of His hands. He has written us in the Lamb’s book of life. He has put our tears into His bottle. We are the apple of His eye. We are precious to Him. We are His jewels. He reveals the mystery of His truth to us. He makes us kings and priests. We are joint heirs with His only begotten Son. Etc.

Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Here we have the result of the first seven beatitudes. If you are poor in spirit, mournful, meek, hungry and thirsting after righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, and a peacemaker, then the inevitable result is that most everyone is going to hate you and persecute you. Don’t be under some delusion that if you are merciful and a peacemaker, for example, that you’re suddenly going to start winning lots of friends – if you are, you’re not being the right kind of merciful peacemaker. It is no accident that this follows “blessed are the peacemakers” – if you are really being a peacemaker as the Bible defines a peacemaker, then you will make enemies. If you tell people what the Bible says about sin, judgment, righteousness, salvation, and reconciliation, they don’t want to hear that. People don’t like to be confronted about their sins. They don’t want anyone suggesting that they’re doing anything wrong.

We have had a lot of experience with persecution in this church. Most so-called Christians nowadays don’t have the first clue of what it means to be persecuted – they can’t identify with this beatitude. Those people should be very concerned. In fact, if there’s a lull in persecution, I start to become nervous and wonder if I’m doing something wrong. If you aren’t persecuted for righteousness’ sake, you can’t claim to be a part of God’s kingdom. Being persecuted for Christ’s sake is evidence that you are part of His kingdom, and that you are therefore at odds with the kingdom of Satan.

Let me be very clear about this: if you aren't being persecuted for Christ, you have no business claiming to be a Christian. And if you are a Christian, you are one who is living in sin, you are ashamed of your Savior, you are hiding His doctrines, and you have compromised in the way you're supposed to be living and speaking. Phony Christians are the ones who always get along with everyone, never offend, and nobody ever says anything bad about them (see Luke 6:26). If you want to escape persecution, it's very easy to do— all you have to do is tell people only what they want to hear. Forsake God, cut out the parts of the Bible that people don't like, and follow the world's standards and mores. If your view of Christ is someone who the world will applaud and revere, you have the wrong view. A lot of people want to be identified with Christ – only if there's no personal price to pay. But you will pay for that later:

“Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” (Mark 8:38)

The New Testament is full of warnings about persecution. It's going to happen. If you live godly in Christ Jesus, you will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:12). Paul says that we are appointed unto afflictions (1 Thessalonians 3:3). And again says suffering for His sake is a gift that was given to us, along with the gift of believing on Him (Philippians 1:29). So don't be shocked when it happens to you. Persecutions are absolutely necessary, because they try our faith. You won't know if your faith is real until you see how you stand up under persecution.

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy *are ye*; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or *as* a thief, or *as* an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if *any man suffer* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.” (1 Peter 4:12-16)

The key here is that we are suffering for righteousness' sake, and for Christ's sake. We should not be suffering because of our own folly and sin. We should not have a martyr complex and go out looking for trouble, just to salve our consciences. You can't provoke someone to anger just for the sake of provoking them to anger and then smugly sit back and rejoice in the trouble that you just stirred up. The persecution that we receive is only a blessing if it is for righteousness' sake. Any other type of persecution is not a blessing. It should be because you're being faithful to God and His Word, not because you're trying to incite someone. It should be because you're fulfilling the characteristics described in the first seven beatitudes,

not because you're trying to anger someone. You can't get the comfort and blessing from this beatitude unless you know in your own heart that you are actually being persecuted for righteousness' sake. If you know that you're being persecuted for some other reason, this will not be a blessing to you.

It's not just that we are persecuted, but that we allow the persecution; we don't unlawfully fight it; we don't rebel against it; we don't run from it; rather, we willingly submit to it and endure it. Furthermore, in the original language, it's continuous in nature. That doesn't mean we will be facing persecution every minute of every day, but the idea is that it's something that will happen throughout our lives, sometimes to a greater and sometimes to a lesser degree, and it's something that could happen at any moment. The word "persecution" is translated from a Greek word that means to drive away, put to flight, pursue, harass, trouble, mistreat. The idea is that they hunt us down and do what they can to run us off. To "revile" means to taunt, reproach, upbraid, defame, chide. It is talking about getting into your face one way or another and hurling insults at you. They "say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake" - they hate Christ, they hate Christ's Word, so they hate you and make up bizarre falsehoods and misrepresentations about you for telling them about Christ and His Word. And they aren't just benign falsehoods – they are intended to discredit, demonize, and silence the preaching of Christ's Word. If they can make you look as bad as possible, then maybe the standard of God will go away, and maybe they won't have to stand before the Judgment Seat.

In the middle of all of this, we are to rejoice. We are to respond to persecution the same way that Christ did when He was here on earth. We are not to harbor retaliatory thoughts, we are not to seek vengeance, we are not to be miserable about it. We are to rejoice.

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2)

We do not rejoice because persecutions are such enjoyable experiences to go through, but rather because of two things. First of all, it is proof that we are citizens of the kingdom of heaven and that we have a great reward there. Anything that we go through here is nothing compared to our reward in heaven. I have a great reward waiting for me in heaven, and persecutions remind me of that reward, so how can I do anything other than rejoice? Secondly, it is proof that we are God's children. They persecute us just like they have always persecuted God's children. We are in good company. As the sister passage in Luke says, "Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets." (Luke 6:23). I love you. Amen.