



Mid-Week

**Bible Study and Prayer
Wednesdays 6:45pm – 8pm**



Good Hope Baptist Church

Pastor Josh Franklin

The Beautiful Attitudes pt. 8– *Believers Under Fire: The Promise of Persecution*

Matthew 5:10-12 (NKJV) - ¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

"I was honored today with having a few stones, dirt, rotten eggs, and pieces of dead cat thrown at me."
- famous preacher, George Whitefield

While meeting here tonight, we have no fear that the local police, state police, or federal officers will disturb our service. But this is not the norm for fellow Christians across our world. In 60 nations, some 200 million people are undergoing persecution right now. The chief persecutors are Communists and Muslims. Some examples:

- 1856 – a law was passed by the Muslims that forbade any church to be built or repaired unless approved by the President of the nation. About 1992, a Christian church repaired their toilet, the officers came in and smashed it and fined the Church with a heavy penalty.
- 12/4/2012 – Pakistani 14-year old Christian girl kidnapped, raped and forced to convert to Islam. When her father asked officials to help, they would not. He found her, but the Mosque officials told him if she tried to live like a Christian, she would be severely punished. The eleven Christians living in the village have been told to leave, or their houses will be burned to the ground.
- Alpha Ministries, Int'l – 150 pastors assaulted, 42 injured, 7 seriously. 100 police stood by and did not raise a hand.

What will persecution look like? It doesn't mean that they're going to throw you in the dungeon. That doesn't mean that they're going to tie you to a post and whip you. That doesn't mean that they're going to come in with a machine gun and kill your children. It may do all. All of that may happen, but that isn't what that necessarily means. The word persecution literally means to pursue, as we're going to see here in a moment. They're going to follow after you in many ways, you will become the bud of jokes, you'll become ostracized socially, you'll be past by for promotions, you'll be looked down upon as socially inappropriate.

Frank Page, president of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, warned of a bleak future for Christians in America. "I'm not a conspiracy theorist, but I do believe the day is coming when churches will see outright persecution as well as a continued pattern of harassment and marginalization in this culture," he told me. "Churches better gear up and realize that day is coming."

The Beattitudes summarize the major components of the Christian life. The 8th beatitude almost looks as if Jesus is promising to all of his disciples, "If your life looks like the first 7 beatitudes, you will be harassed, mistreated and scorned."

2 Timothy 3:12 - Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

(Message) Anyone who wants to live all out for Christ is in for a lot of trouble; there's no getting around it.

I. WHAT ARE THE REASONS CHRISTIANS ARE PERSECUTED?

A. For righteousness' sake – living right – not self-righteous. Note the difference between punishment and persecution. **1 Peter 4:14-16 reads**, "If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter."

1. Punishment is a penalty imposed for doing wrong. A preacher in Clinton embezzled \$700,000, and said he was persecuted but really he was justly punished. Let's be sure if we are persecuted, it will be for the sake of righteousness and not our self-righteousness, crimes, sins, or foolish adventures.

- Sad to say, some believers do not know the difference between being offensive and 'the offense of the cross' (Galatians 5:11). If I get into trouble because I talk too much or because I meddle or because I try to force my faith on other people, that is not persecution. If I am arrogant and abusive in my attempt to witness for Christ and people want nothing to do with me, that is not persecution. [*Warren Wiersbe, Live Like a King, 150-1*]

2. Persecution is a penalty for doing right. True persecution comes "for righteousness' sake." It is the result of the believer's daring to live the Beatitudes. The world's philosophy is exactly opposite of that which Jesus expresses in the Beatitudes, and these opposite viewpoints lead to opposing ways of life...We are walking in one direction, and the world is walking in the other, and it is impossible not to collide. The Christian's integrity condemns the ungodly world and brings out its hostility. People hate a righteous life because it exposes their own unrighteousness.

- Jesus tells us to be "poor in spirit," but the world tells us to build up our egos and be important.
- Neither is the world interested in "mourning over sin." Unbelievers will quickly regret the uncomfortable effects of sin, but even that passes away.
- Meekness they consider weakness, for, after all, it is the aggressive man who gets ahead in this world.
- The world had no appetite for righteousness. Its motto is "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die!"
- Mercy – purity of heart – and peacemaking are concepts that are rarely, if ever, found in the mind of the unbeliever. To show mercy when your enemy is under your sword's point is to lose the victory. Such is the "counsel of the ungodly" (Psalm 1:1). [*ibid., 151-152*]

B. For His namesake – Millions are persecuted because they are Christians, and nothing else. All over the world people are persecuted simply because they are Christians. You may be living in a neighborhood where your neighbors have a big party and everybody is invited but you. You are not excluded because of anything you have done but just because you are a Christian.

John 15:18-20 (NKJV) If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet 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

II. WHAT SHOULD BE THE CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSE TO PERSECUTION?

How Christians should NOT REACT: Don't RETALIATE; Don't seek REVENGE. Don't strike back.

How Christians should RESPOND: REIGN, REJOICE AND RELEASE GOD'S LOVE.

1. We REIGN (Matthew 5:10) "theirs is the kingdom" When you know you are a king, it is beneath your dignity to retaliate, because that only makes you like other people. On March 11, 1830, a British girl was doing her lessons with her tutor, and the lesson that day had to do with the royal family. As she studied the genealogical chart in the book, she became aware of the astounding fact that she was next in line for the throne! At first she wept, and then she looked at her tutor and said, "I will be good!" The fact that little Victoria would one day be queen motivated her to live on a higher level; and the fact that you and I are already kings should motivate us not to retaliate. [ibid, 154]

2. We REJOICE (Matthew 5:12) – "rejoice" literally means to leap, dance and jump. You're so happy, you can't keep your feet on the ground. Why? because you've been persecuted. People can truly see that you are different, and that you follow Christ.

- Rejoice because you are a member of the Kingdom and you are eternally saved.
- Rejoice because you have a God who will protect you and provide for you.
- Rejoice because you know you have an unusual opportunity to witness. Example: Apostle Paul in prison in Rome, chained to a guard, and writing to the church at Philippi said, "But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." (Philippians 1:12-14)
- Rejoice because you are in good company, because they also persecuted the prophets before you, as well as Jesus. Acts 5:41 reads, "So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name."

3. We RELEASE GOD'S LOVE (Matthew 5:43-48)

- Illustration: 1956 – Five brave missionaries were martyred by the Auca Indians – their five widows moved in and lived with the people and won this tribe to Christ.

III. WHAT ARE THE REWARDS OF BEING PERSECUTED?

- A. Present reward: Opportunity to witness; Opportunity to grow; Opportunity to honor the Lord; Opportunity to convince an unbelieving world of your sincerity and the power of Jesus.
 - "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church" (Tertullian)
- B. Future reward – "Great is your reward in heaven." 2 Timothy 2:12; Romans 8:17-18; 1 Peter 5:10; 2 Corinthians 4:17;

IV. WHAT SHOULD OUR ATTITUDE BE TOWARD PERSECUTION?

1. We should expect persecution. 1 Peter 4:12; 2 Corinthians 3:12
2. We should be disturbed if we are not being persecuted. Luke 6:26; Amos 6:1
3. We should be troubled that the average church and Christians are so bland, harmless, passionless, and uncaring that the world does not persecute them. While the early church was persecuted, the modern church is just being ignored.
4. We should pray for the persecuted church across the earth.
5. We should visit, encourage and pray for persecuted Christians around the world.
6. We should realize that the word "witness" and "martyr" are the same word in the Greek. Acts 1:8 says when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you shall be my Martures which means "witness" or "martyr". This means we should be willing to witness, not only if it brings suffering, but death itself.

Three recommended books:

Foxe's Book of Martyrs

Jesus Freaks, by: DC Talk and Voice of the Martyrs – persecuted Christians from today.

Operation: World – a prayer guide

EXTRA MATERIAL FOR TEACHING

Introductory Story – Teenage girl at Youth Camp – “If you come to Jesus, and truly live for Him, you won’t be invited to those same parties that you were invited to anymore. You won’t be as popular as you are now. God will be faithful to you, but you will be persecuted.”

[From *God Less America* by Todd Starnes] Over the past few years, I’ve documented hundreds of instances of religious persecution, including:

- A North Carolina pastor who was fired from his duties as an honorary chaplain for the state House of Representatives after he invoked the name of Jesus in a prayer
- A senior citizens’ center in Port Wentworth, Georgia, that told elderly guests they could no longer pray over their meals
- A federal judge who ordered a Texas school district to prohibit public prayer at the Medina Valley Independent School District graduation ceremony. The judge also forbade students from using religious words such as prayer and amen
- A Massachusetts eight-year-old boy who was sent home from school and ordered to undergo a psychiatric evaluation after he drew a picture of Jesus on a cross
- A professor at the University of Kentucky who applied for a job directing the university’s observatory but was turned down after the hiring committee found out he was a Christian
- Bibles and other religious materials that were briefly banned from Walter Reed Medical Center
- A New York public school teacher who was ordered to remove inspirational Bible verses from her classroom. The teacher was also told to remove a quote from former The teacher was also told to remove a quote from former we ever forget that we are one nation under God, then we will be a nation gone under.”

1 Peter 4:14-16 - ¹⁴ If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.

¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters.

¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

(CEV) ¹⁴ Count it a blessing when you suffer for being a Christian. This shows that God's glorious Spirit is with you. ¹⁵ But you deserve to suffer if you are a murderer, a thief, a crook, or a busybody. ¹⁶ Don't be ashamed to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God that you belong to him.

Jon Courson said, “Many times Christians are being persecuted not because they’re living righteously, but because they’re weird. Weirdness doesn’t count!” *Story – In High school, there was a guy who always went around being weird and annoying – yelling crazy statements to people, yet living a hypocritical life at other times. He may have thought when people made fun of him that he was “suffering” for Jesus, but he wasn’t He was treated bad because he was weird and annoying!*

Adrian Rogers has said, “My friend, the world hates Jesus Christ. Now, the world does not hate the baby Jesus. Pretty soon Christmas will come and everybody loves a baby in a manger. The world doesn't hate the baby Jesus. A few people may. But by in large, the world, the giddy crowd, dances around the manger and the merchants will make millions. They don't mind the baby Jesus. I'm going to tell you something else. The world does not hate the Jesus that healed the sick and fed the multitudes. The world doesn't hate that Jesus, not at all. That isn't why the world hates Jesus. And if that's all you know of the Lord Jesus Christ, then you make think that the world really doesn't hate the Lord Jesus. Do you know why the world hates Jesus? Jesus said I have come to destroy the works of the devil. And that my dear friend is why the world hates Jesus. Jesus has come to destroy the works of the devil. What are they? Liquor, abortion, pornography, pride, racism, and greed. And Jesus Christ stands against that and the world stands for it.”

Illustration: Adrian Rogers - You don't have to go around trying to win popularity contests. There's a concert violinist and he was good. He played at concert that brought everybody to their feet. He slipped off the stage, the people would not sit down. The people said, Go back and take a second bow, they won't sit down, they're giving you an ovation. He said, I don't want to go out there. They said, Listen, they love you, they all love you. He said, No they don't. He said, You see that little man sitting over there with his head down, he's not standing? That is my teacher. He's not standing and if he's not pleased, I'm not pleased. Let me tell you something. If you displease Jesus, it really doesn't matter who you please. And if you please Jesus, it really doesn't matter whom you displease. I mean if Jesus is pleased, that's all that you really need to care about. If the Lord Jesus Christ is pleased, then he is going to say, Well done. The Beatitudes present a portrait of the ideal citizen in Christ's kingdom. Notice the emphases on *righteousness* (v. 6), *peace* (v. 9), and *joy* (v. 12). Paul probably had this passage in mind when he wrote: “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17).