

Matthew 5.10-12
St Stephens

March 22, 2009
Sunday Sanctuary

Blessed are the Persecuted

We are in a message series on **Christlikeness** in this season of Lent, using the 7 Deadly Sins on Weds nights and the Beatitudes on Sunday mornings. On Wednesday night, Dr Leander Harding will speak about the deadly sin of **gluttony**.

Today we are looking at the last of the Beatitudes, perhaps the **least favorite** of the Beatitudes:

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5.10

It was hard for me at first glance to see the **linkage** between the two, between suffering persecution and gluttony. But if you think of **what they do**, you quickly see the connection. **When you are persecuted** because of God's values or because of your faith in God's Son, it **strips you** of things that don't matter so much. It just **peels things away** from you. And **what matters most, remains**.

But when you **give yourself to gluttony**, you just add things to you. Things that don't last and don't satisfy and in the end, don't matter. And what matters most gets overwhelmed. Well, Leander will have a lot more to say about that on Wednesday night, after a good dinner, and lots of desserts, I might add! Come and join us, and bring food to share!!

No one thinks this Beatitude is a blessing. Listen to how it worked out in Paul's life...

Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes.

Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers, from my own people, from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm.

2 Cor 11.24-27

Blessed!?! Who wants to sign up for a life like this? Who wants to get in that line? But Jesus goes on and says it again...

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5.11-12

Well, let's take some time to **sort it out**. I want to ask a question of our beatitude this morning...

Who Does Jesus Bless?

...those who are persecuted for righteousness sake...

...you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Matt 5.10,11

You might remember if you were with us on Ash Wednesday that I talked about the word '**righteousness**'. Righteousness is '**the way things are supposed to be**'. Every one knows that this world is not the way it is supposed to be. We are out of sorts. When you become

a follower of Jesus **he gives you eyes to see** this stuff. People who are persecuted for righteousness **can see** the way things are supposed to be and they **care** about the way things are supposed to be. You care about what God cares about. You see broken people and they step in and try and help. You get into the battle.

You **call people to repentance and forgiveness** and a new life, and all of a sudden it is a **clash of kingdoms**, and people start to get into your face and tell you to give it up and back off. But you can't. And all of a sudden **you are in trouble**. Jesus seems to suggest that his followers are **always going to be getting into trouble**.

It is important that we get in trouble **for the right reasons**.

Look at the phrase, **'on my account'** – a good reason to get into trouble would be because of your allegiance to Jesus.

Look at the phrase **'falsely'** – That means people have wrongly accused you of wrongdoing.

There are too many times when Christians are simply **argumentative or angry or arrogant** – and it is not Jesus who is the offense, but us. Don't claim this blessing – or hide behind it because you are being a jerk. This beatitude does not give you the excuse to be a 'Jerk for Jesus'.

You want to **get into trouble for the right reasons**. A survey of the Sermon on the Mount suggests some ways this might work out:

- In our obedience to Scripture we might be called unsophisticated, anti-intellectual and fundamentalists
- In our struggle for sexual purity we might be called Puritans
- In our faithfulness to our marriage partners we might be called out of date and old fashioned
- In letting our 'yes be yes' we might be called 'inflexible' and 'rigid'

- In loving our enemies we might be called disloyal and dangerous
- In calling people to faith in Jesus we might be called 'narrow' or 'fanatics'.

There is something about this that is inevitable. Paul said,
All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

2 Tim 3.12

It is **a promise**. Not one that we pray for very often! I never hear people say, "Lord I claim this promise as my own..."

Which raises **a couple pokey questions**.

What if I never am persecuted? What if there never is any rub? Well - and here the beatitudes begin to examine us again – **maybe we don't desire to live a godly life**. Maybe the salt has lost its saltiness. Maybe the light has been put under a bushel. Remember how Jesus said, "*Woe to you when all men speak well of you.*" It is the danger of setting your course from the popularity polls. It is worth thinking about.

But here is the companion question: **What if I am causing offense to people all the time?** What if I am always getting in people's face – and a lot of people just **avoid me**? Well – it is worth remembering that Jesus was known as the **friend of sinners**. And if we are always causing offense, **maybe it is not Jesus that is the offense, but us**. Maybe it is just me being a jerk again. It is worth thinking about.

There is a very important **balance** here – something like loving sinners, while we hate the sin.

And then, Jesus simply says when you step up because of your faith in

me and you get slammed down, you are blessed and you will be blessed. That is worth remembering as we go through **this realignment**. What if we have to pay a price for our faith. What if we lose our property?

Thomas a Kempis 'Imitation of Christ'

MY CHILD, do not take it to heart if some people think badly of you and say unpleasant things about you. You ought to think worse things of yourself and to believe that no one is weaker than yourself...

Do not let your peace depend on the words of men. Their thinking well or badly of you does not make you different from what you are. Where are true peace and glory? Are they not in Me? He who neither cares to please men nor fears to displease them will enjoy great peace...

Think of My suffering and that of the saints, and cease complaining. You have not yet resisted to the shedding of blood. **What you suffer is very little...**

the truly patient man does not consider from whom the suffering comes, whether from a superior, an equal, or an inferior, whether from a good and holy person or from a perverse and unworthy one; but no matter how great an adversity befalls him, no matter how often it comes or from whom it comes, he accepts it gratefully from the hand of God, and counts it a great gain. For with God nothing that is suffered for His sake, no matter how small, can pass without reward.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.