

## **Beatitudes 8: Blessed are those who are Persecuted**

**by Marion Taylor**

**Windsor Park Baptist Church November 30<sup>th</sup> 2010**

I remember an incident that happened not long after I moved to New Zealand. I had been in my job here for a couple of months when the incident happened. My new work mates right from day one, told me about this woman who was the boss's Secretary. They told me quite a few nasty stories about her and warned me not to have anything to do with her. I felt this was unfair and nasty of my workmates. I decided I would make up my own mind about this woman. My work mates were not pleased when they saw me chatting with her a few days later. They questioned me and I told them that as a Christian, I believed everybody should be given a chance. My workmates were not happy. I discovered that I really enjoyed the company of the woman they hated. The more I got to know this woman, I realised how hurt, lonely and isolated this woman felt. What you saw on the outside was quite different to who she was on the inside. I was very careful never to tell the woman anything about my work mates or what they said and I did the same with my work mates. As time passed, I started to realise that my workmates were not talking much to me. This got even worse. By the end they wouldn't even talk to me about work issues. I was very upset by this stage and didn't understand what was going on. It all came to a head one morning. After some intervention from one of the bosses, my workmates had to own up to what they were doing. They said they had 'sent me to Coventry'. 'Sent to Coventry' means that the person is to be ignored or ostracised. This behaviour often takes the form of pretending that the shunned person, although conspicuously present, can't be seen or heard. This was to punish me for not going along with them concerning the woman they hated, and for sticking to my Christian beliefs. These work mates also thought I was telling this woman all about their business. I made it very clear to them that I never talked about them to this woman. They accepted this and so finally things settled into a good working relationship between all of us.

Why have I told you this story? It is just a small example in my own life of what I am going to talk about tonight.

I am going to look at the last Beatitude found in Matthew 5:10-12.

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

11 "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

The sermons on the previous seven Beatitudes, describe the way to live our lives as followers of Jesus. Jesus has given us the gift of righteousness, a right relationship with God, if we believe in Him.

What are these last three verses really saying?

The last three verses give us hope and the promise of eternal life in heaven with Father (Daddy to me), Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Those who genuinely are a disciple of Jesus will be persecuted and will suffer as Jesus had to suffer. Paul writes to Timothy in 2Timothy 3:12 "Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

Verses 11 and 12 are an expansion of verse 10. Verse 10 is a statement telling us all what will result from living a life that is right before God and then verses 11 and 12 is a statement of the blessing we will receive. This "will draw the line and divide between those who are truly righteous and those that are not - between those that are truly Christians and are saved, and those that feign Christianity, but are not actually converted and saved."<sup>1</sup>

We as Christians, living in New Zealand, are now surrounded by people whose values and priorities are increasingly different to God's. People are becoming more hostile to anything that may be termed as living a God focused life. We then end up with a clash of two opposing forces on how to live life.

What does the word 'persecuted' really mean?

"To be pursued, follow after, suffer, chase after, to run after with hostile intent, to hunt."  
"It is like a continuous, ruthless chase to hunt down the prey!"<sup>2</sup>

"There are parts of the world, where people are being persecuted for Christ. For them, following Christ means suffering, rejection and even death."<sup>2</sup> You will all be seeing examples of this type of persecution in a video clip that will be shown at the end of this message.

In this country, "We may not go through physical persecution or suffering, but we all feel being constantly chased after by the enemy of Christ. When we pursue righteousness, we may find ourselves constantly running or fleeing from the spiritual forces who are after us to knock us down."<sup>2</sup>

In the story I told you, I felt persecuted. I was in a new country and knew no one. My main contact with people was at work. It was here where I wanted to find friends and people that would be supportive of me as I established myself here. Yet, I found the opposite. The blessing that I received for standing on my belief's was, the boss that intervened happened to be a Christian and an elder of his Church. He invited me to go to his Church the following Sunday where I met his wife and family. They took me under their wing and were like an

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<sup>1</sup>[http://gracebible.org/blessed\\_are\\_those\\_persecuted\\_for\\_righteousness\\_sake](http://gracebible.org/blessed_are_those_persecuted_for_righteousness_sake)

<sup>2</sup><http://bibleseo.com/matthew/persecuted-righteousness-beatitudes-bible-study-series-part-8-8/>

adopted family for me. I spent most Sundays with them and I even went away with them on a long weekend holiday. I even went with them to a Christian Music Camp where, would you believe, I met a guy who was in charge of all the music at Murray's Bay Baptist Church which is the origins of this Church.

In this country I feel as a Christian Community that we tend to suffer a kind of 'social' persecution. This is where "someone spreads untruths about us to others with something like slander or gossip."<sup>3</sup>

So, how does Jesus tell us to respond to persecution?

Jesus tells us to "rejoice and be glad". This response to persecution would shock our persecutors and confuse them. Also, when we are persecuted for Jesus, we enter in to a great club with the prophets of old.

What is our reward in the kingdom of heaven?

None of us really know. Peter said in 1Peter 1:3-6 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials.

James writes in James 5:10-11a, "My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure"

Paul says in 2Corinthians 4:17-18, "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

To rejoice in times of persecution helps us not to feel resentful, depressed or revengeful. This can still be very difficult and this is why we need to be part of a supportive Church community. Where we can be open and honest with each other, and be encouraged in times of persecution.

The video you are going to see is of different types of persecution experienced by people who believe in Jesus. These persecutions are happening now, in our world, 2010. These are pretty graphic. You may ask yourself, 'What can I do to help?' One thing we all will be doing is, raising money at our Christmas Dinner to buy cows for a third world country. As you heard in the notices, Barry and Ange are having their hair dyed Christmas colours and then

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bethanybible.org/archive/2004/082904.htm>

their hair shaved off at the Christmas Dinner as an incentive for people to give money towards the cows.

There is something else that we can do. We need to pray. Pray for those being persecuted. Pray for the persecutors that they would turn to Christ. That they would come into truth.

Jesus says

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:44, 45

We are called to pray and love our enemies, a totally different response to what the world would expect. Being a Christian is not a wimpy option, it is a way of living that might just get up peoples noses!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZdTkFO6k3ts>

### **Personal Reflection**

- Point to ponder

When we are persecuted for Jesus, we enter in to a great club with the prophets of old

- Verse to remember

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:10

- Questions to consider

1. How do you respond to people insulting you because of your faith?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How does Jesus ask us to respond?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. How do we help others who might be experiencing persecution?

- Prayer to Pray

Father, I think of all my fellow brothers and sisters in your great big family that might be undergoing persecution at this moment. Strengthen them and help me when I am going through tough times because of my faith in you. Amen