

Happiness: Blessed are the Persecuted

Matt 5:10-12

Small Group Guide

Opening Warmup Questions:

- Before we look at our passage, what image or experience first comes to mind when you hear the word, “persecution?”
- How would you define persecution?

OPTIONAL BACKGROUND READING/INTRO:

This summer we’ve been studying the Beatitudes in a series called “Happiness.” We’ve seen how the word, “Blessed,” is talking about a kind of deep, lasting happiness that is true regardless of life stage, regardless of economic status, regardless of race or nationality. Jesus is telling us what the good life looks like. Today we’re looking at the last of the Beatitudes, from Matthew 5:10-12.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

In an effort to understand what Jesus is saying, we will at least address three facets of persecution today: **1) the reality of persecution; and 2) the revelation of persecution, in other words, what it reveals; and 3) our response to the reality of persecution.**

READ Matthew 5:10-12.

The Reality of Persecution

1. In today’s passage, Jesus mentions two specific reasons for being persecuted. The first is “because of righteousness” (v10). What does it mean to be treated unfairly for being righteous?
 - a. Sometimes this concept is misunderstood, and Christians bring persecution on themselves for a variety of wrong reasons. What would it look like to be persecuted because you are unrighteous?
2. The second way you could be persecuted is “because of [Jesus]” (v11). What would this look like – in high school? In business? Parents with kids in sports? Could this happen even in church?
3. Josh said that persecution is part of the package. In other words, it has always been a normative part of Christian experience, historically and even in the world today. What’s your first reaction to hearing that persecution is the norm for a Christian?

The Revelation of Persecution (What does it Reveal?)

4. Read v12 again. What does it reveal about what attitude Jesus wants us to have when persecuted?
5. Pastor Josh says that Jesus uses a compound word “which means to leap exceedingly”? Does v12 give any clues about how we could learn to “jump for joy” when persecuted?

6. Remember the two little parables that Jesus told, which Matthew records a few chapters later, in Ch. 13? They're parables about hidden treasure and a Pearl of Great Price. **Read** them, in Matt. 13:44-46.
 - a. What light do these parables shed on today's Beatitude? What do they reveal about how we might be able to "jump for joy" when persecuted?

7. According to Josh's sermon, persecution reveals that the kingdom of heaven is the one thing worth giving anything up. He said it this way:

People who are willing to undergo cruel treatment because of their connection with Jesus are happy people because they have found the kingdom of God; it is the only thing precious enough to lead them to give up everything, and the only thing that gives them a lasting joy in great loss. The fact that they're willing to go through persecution and not take the easy way out is confirmation that they have found the kingdom of heaven—the greatest treasure imaginable—because they're willing to let everything else go in order to keep it.

8. How does persecution reveal the treasure that is the kingdom of God?
9. How might our comforts as Americans and as wealthy North Shore Long Islanders (as compared to other parts of the world and parts of our nation) weaken our resolve in facing persecution?

Our Response to the Reality & Revelation of Persecution

10. Pastor Josh mentioned two responses, but feel free to raise others. First, as in the two short parables, how can we treasure Jesus and his kingdom now? What attitude shift, spiritual practice, etc., might we adopt?
11. Second, how can we more confidently engage our community in the name of Jesus? Does the quote below by Peter Kreeft help at all? Discuss.

In a cruel and simple society, persecution takes a cruel and simple form. Christians are thrown to the lions.... In a comfortable and complex society like ours, persecution is more insidious because it is masked. It is an attack on the mind, not the body. It takes place in the media, not the coliseum.

12. Also, how might we identify and, with God's help, get rid of poor behavior that gets us persecuted unnecessarily and hurts the image of Jesus?
13. Prayer: God's kingdom is the one treasure worth giving up or enduring anything. Among our usual prayer requests, let's pray that we more fully grasp the greatness of God's kingdom, so that we can "jump for joy" at being persecuted, knowing the character in us and the witness to the world it produces.