Lesson 8

Blessed are those who are Persecuted for Righteousness' Sake

We have reached the final Beatitude. This one is a little different. The previous seven Beatitudes are characteristics of the Christian man and woman. Verse ten seems to be the result of living in accordance to the first seven Beatitudes. Yet, it is important that we understand, being *persecuted for righteousness' sake* is part of Christian character. To be persecuted isn't something to be desired; but then again, maybe it is! To be persecuted is to follow in Jesus' footsteps.

1. Read Matthew 5:1-12 then record Matthew 5:10.

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2. Summarize Matthew 5:11-12.

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3. Read Luke 6:22-23. Make note of any differences or similarities between these two passages.

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Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines *persecuted* as: "to harass, trouble, molest one; to be maltreated, suffer persecution on account of something."

It is important to know that those who are *persecuted,* are persecuted on account of something; and that "something" is *for righteousness' sake.* Jesus was not speaking of being persecuted for a good opinion or conservative politics or a just cause.

Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines *righteousness* as: "integrity, virtue, purity of life, uprightness, correctness in thinking, feeling and acting."

You may recall from Lesson 4 that The *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* defines *righteousness* as: "of whatever is right or just in itself, whatever conforms to the revealed will of God."

4. Read Philippians 3:9. How can we attain righteousness?

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We cannot be righteous on our own. We are only righteous through faith, and we are only righteous because God is righteous. When we pursue the things of God, we pursue righteousness and will be more like God.

Blessed, or happy, we will be if we are persecuted for being like Jesus.

> If I seek to do His will and honor His name and as a result I suffer,
> then that is persecution.
>
> ~ Warren Wiersbe

It makes perfect sense that this is the final Beatitude. The Beatitudes are the picture of Christian character. They each reflect Jesus and reveal to us how we are to be... and Jesus was persecuted.

Read Isaiah 53:1-12. These verses were a prophecy of the coming Messiah, Jesus our Lord.

5. From these verses in Isaiah, list all Jesus suffered for us:

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6. Next, describe Jesus' humility.

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7. Finally, consider Jesus' character and His sacrifice. Describe how this was persecution.

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Jesus makes it quite clear in Scripture that those who follow Him, will share in His sufferings.

8. Look up the following verses and record what they teach you about persecution or the lack of it.

Luke 6:26

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_____

John 15:18-20

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_____

Philippians 1:29

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Persecution can sound a little scary, and it definitely can be viewed as something not to be desired; however, we can be assured that we will be blessed when we are!

9. Read Philippians 3:10-14. Describe the heart of Paul and the ultimate reward he is living for.

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10. Read Romans 8:18. How are we able to have joy in persecutions and sufferings?

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11. Read Matthew 5:12. What is promised to those who are persecuted?

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12. Read Acts 5:12-16. What was taking place with the apostles?

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_____

13. Read Acts 5:17-28 and briefly describe what happened.

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14. Record Peter's amazing statement in Acts 5:29.

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15. Do you see many Christians today living by Peter's example in Acts 5:29?

_____

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16. Think of a time when you witnessed someone with this same attitude, maybe it was you! Write about this time.

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_____

Continue reading Acts 5:30-42.

17. What caused the apostles to rejoice? (v. 41)

_____

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18. Did they then live in fear of being imprisoned again? (v. 42) _____

The apostles desired to live like Jesus, they *hungered and thirsted for righteousness.* They wanted everyone to know of Jesus and the hope and peace which could be found in Him. They were *peacemakers.* They were persecuted by being thrown in

prison. Their persecution was for *righteousness' sake.* They were not making political statements; they were not being fanatical or overzealous. They were simply living <u>for</u> Jesus, living <u>like</u> Jesus and <u>telling others about</u> Jesus.

It should not be expected that persecution will only come from secular men and women. In Acts 5, the apostles were put in prison by a sect of the religious leaders, called the Sadducees. Jesus' greatest opponents were the religious men of His day.

19. Read John 5:15-16. Who persecuted Jesus?

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20. Read John 19:5-6. Who was it who cried out, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"?

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21. But, when Jesus was crucified, what did He request of the Father and for whom? See Luke 23:34.

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22. Read Matthew 5:44. We are to pray for whom?

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23. Describe the heart of Jesus towards those who persecuted Him.

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24. Could you have a heart like this towards those who persecute you, simply because you pursue righteousness?

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If we begin with being *poor in spirit* and *mourning* for our sins and then, being filled with the Holy Spirit, we are made *meek*, leading us to *hunger and thirst for righteousness.* Simply desiring to be like Jesus by being *merciful* and *peacemakers*... means we **CAN** and **WILL** love those who persecute us!

To live out the Beatitudes is to be different. To be holy and righteous is also unlike the world, and, because of Jesus, it is okay!

25. Read Matthew 5:11-12. In verse 11, what is one way we can suffer persecution?

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26. We suffer for whose sake?
    _____

27. Doesn't this make it all worth it? _____

28. Why can we be glad? (v. 12)

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A Character Study – Stephen

Background: Jesus has ascended into Heaven and the early church is experiencing rapid growth. In fact, it is growing so fast, they are having a difficult time keeping up with the needs of the people. When a complaint arises about the neglect of certain widows, the 12 disciples seek out seven men to serve these widows.

29. Read Acts 6:3. Describe the type of men they were looking for.

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30. Stephen was one of these men. Read Acts 6:5, 8 and record the further description given for Stephen.

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31. Continue reading Acts 6:9-14 and briefly describe what happened.

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Stephen showed great wisdom with those who disputed with him. They found it impossible to resist the wisdom and Spirit by which he spoke. When they realized they couldn't defeat him in a fair fight, they resorted to lying about him instead.

32. Now standing before the council, what did the councilmen see? (v. 15)

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A face which reflected perfect peace and confidence which stemmed from his knowledge of and trust in God.

In Acts 7, Stephen responds to the court of his peers with a stirring speech of Israel's history. You may choose to read the entire account.

33. In verses 51-53, Stephen charges them with some accusations of his own. Record each one below.

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_____

_____

_____

34. Compare the two reactions found in verses 54-60.

The Councilman	Stephen

One man with the face of an angel, falsely accused vs. a group of men gnashing their teeth, rightfully accused but blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

35. Carefully note the posture of Jesus while Stephen was being persecuted. (v. 55-56)

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Jesus stood up and took special notice of Stephen when he faced persecution for Jesus' sake. How amazing is that?! Your suffering will never be in vain.

36. Record the last two things Stephen said before he died. (v. 59-60)

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Read Luke 23:34,46. Stephen had certainly become like Jesus!

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

Jesus ends with the same promise He began with. We must always be about His kingdom.

From our first lesson, we learned the Greek word for kingdom is *basileia* which means, "the realm in which a sovereign king rules." Often in the New Testament, the word *kingdom* refers to the rule of Christ in the hearts of believers.

37. Read Luke 17:20-21 and record what you learn about the kingdom of God.

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The kingdom of Heaven (or God) can also refer to the future kingdom.

38. Read Hebrews 1:3. Where did Jesus go after He had purged our sins?

_____

39. After reading Ephesians 2:4-6, explain where will we be?

_____

_____

We have a place in His kingdom today and for all eternity; and for this we should be exceeding happy and blessed! We must always be living for our future hope. What Jesus has done for us and the promise of everlasting life in the presence of God *is* our reason to live, according to Matthew 5:3-12.

As our study comes to an end, let's review what we have learned these past eight weeks. For each Beatitude write down the meaning. Next, write about your own personal experience with this Beatitude. Then, list any changes you need to make. Finally, write out the promise Jesus gives for that particular Beatitude

40. Poor in Spirit

Meaning:	
Personal experience:	
Ways I can be more like this:	
The Promise:	

41. Mourn

Meaning:	
Personal experience:	
Ways I can be more like this:	
The Promise:	

42. Meek

Meaning:	
Personal experience:	
Ways I can be more like this:	
The Promise:	

43. Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

Meaning:	
Personal experience:	
Ways I can be more like this:	
The Promise:	

44. Merciful

Meaning:	
Personal experience:	
Ways I can be more like this:	
The Promise:	

45. Pure in Heart

Meaning:	
Personal experience:	
Ways I can be more like this:	
The Promise:	

46. Peacemaker

Meaning:	
Personal experience:	
Ways I can be more like this:	
The Promise:	

47. Persecuted for Righteousness sake

Meaning:	
Personal experience:	
Ways I can be more like this:	
The Promise:	

These eight Beatitudes beautifully describe the characteristics of a godly man and woman who are set apart for the glory of God. With these characteristics we can rightly do what Jesus asks of us as He continues to give the rest of the Sermon on the Mount.

End your study of The Beatitudes in prayer.

Lesson 8 – For Further Study

Blessed are those who are Persecuted for Righteousness Sake

Paul encouraged the believers in Philippi to not be terrified by their adversaries. If their enemies failed in making them afraid, they failed altogether. Paul goes on to explain why they should not be afraid.

Read Philippians 1:29-30. What reason does Paul give?

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They need not be afraid because it has been granted to them on behalf of Christ. The occasion to believe has been granted to us, and we gratefully receive it. So too, has suffering for His sake been granted to us – another privilege for the believer.

Use *blueletterbible.org* to look up the following words for a better understanding of what this verse means (use the Scripture index in *Thayer's Greek Lexicon* for even more insight).

Believe (I Definition)

_____

_____

Suffer

_____

_____

> Everyone cannot be trusted with suffering. All could not stand the fiery ordeal. They would speak rashly and complainingly. So the Master has to select with careful scrutiny the branches which can stand the knife.
>
> – Meyer

It is hard to think about persecution as a privilege, but it is. Paul wrote to Timothy, "if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Timothy 2:12).

Read Revelation 2:8-11. The church at Smyrna was being persecuted for their refusal to worship Caesar. What did Jesus instruct them to do when persecution came? (v.10)

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Read Revelation 19:11-16. Who is referred to as faithful and true?

_____

_____

Read Hebrews 12:1-2. Describe how we are to stand in times of persecution.

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If we fail to consider Jesus, what will happen? (Hebrews 12:3)

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Jesus himself is the example we are to follow.

Read the account of Jesus' arrest in John 18-19 and make notes of the example Jesus left for us to follow in times of persecution.

John 18

v. 5 _____

v. 8 _____

v.11_____

v.13_____

v. 20-21_____

v. 23_____

v. 36-37_____

John 19

v. 8 _____

v. 11 _____

v. 17 _____

v. 26-27 _____

v. 30 _____

Jesus truly was faithful to the point of death. He walked this road for us, and so, it is a great privilege to the same for His sake!

> Look up and take each throb of pain, each hour of agony, as a gift. Dare to thank Him for it. Look inside the envelope of pain for the message it enfolds. It is a rough packing-case, but there is treasure in it.
>
> - Meyer

Write a prayer of gratitude and application.

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