

Beatitudes: Persecution

Matthew 5:10-12

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Joshua Koura

Camden Valley Baptist Church

www.cvbaptist.com

TRANSCRIPT:

Matthew Chapter 5, I'd like us to read verse 1 through to verse 12.

"And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain. And when He was seated, His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.'"

Father, we come before You again with hearts rejoicing in the salvation we have received through our Lord Jesus Christ. And Lord, You have promised to send Your Spirit upon those who are Your disciples, that they might serve You, worship You, and praise You in the power of the Holy Spirit. And we ask now that You would do just that, Lord God, that You would fulfill Your promise to us even this morning, that You would send the Holy Spirit to cause Your people to hear and to obey Your word, and to grant me the grace and unction, Lord, to proclaim Your word, that Your people's faith would not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. And to this, we ask You, Lord, with hearts ready to receive, in Jesus' name, Amen. Amen.

In verse number nine of this chapter, we considered last week the beatitude that reads, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." We saw that the sons of God are people that make peace, are people of peace, that have tasted God's peace, and they, in like manner, reciprocate that peace to others, knowing that they have received from the Lord that which they did not deserve. But today, we consider that

the peacemakers, not all is peace for the peacemakers. So even though the sons of God are peacemakers, it does not mean all shall be peace for them. For immediately in the subsequent beatitude, the Lord Jesus says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And straight away, we are introduced to the fact that those people that seek peace will be confronted and will be faced with opposition, and they will be persecuted for what the scripture talks about here as righteousness' sake. And it says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted or blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake." Now immediately, from a naturalistic human understanding, we look at a passage like this and ask ourselves the question, is this a mistake? Surely blessed and happy life and the life that is favored by God is one of persecution? Surely not. Maybe there's something else here that we need to read into the passage. Maybe there's we're forgetting something, we're missing something. Maybe if we were one of the disciples of Jesus, we would have perked up right then and there and say, "Come on, Jesus, are you sure you want to finish the sentence? Is there something else you need to say here? How can persecution be something to be regarded as blessed? It doesn't make sense to the natural mind, yet the clear testimony of scripture repeatedly says that the blessing of God and the favor of God is upon those that are persecuted. It's a spiritual truth and reality that can only be understood and known by those who know God. Only God can make persecution something sweet, a bittersweet if we could say, to His children. He can only make persecution something that is to be regarded as a blessing. And look what it says here in 1 Peter 4:14, "It says if you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you." Peter repeats what Jesus essentially says here. He says, "For the spirit of glory and of God rest upon you. On their part, He is blasphemed, but on your part, He is glorified." And so the Bible teaches us that there is a special work of the Holy Spirit that's vouchsafed; it is given, it is granted to those that are persecuted. He says that the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. When? To who? To those that are regarded as persecuted. And so Peter could equally say with Jesus, they're blessed. Even in his own experience, he experienced that. The Apostle Paul says a similar thing when he says that "I might know Him" in Philippians 3:10, "and the power of His resurrection." And he says, "and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformed more and more into His death." And what Paul understood is that there's a special fellowship that comes to those that suffer with Christ in the sufferings of Christ. That not only is there mediated to them this special work of the Holy Spirit, but there is this unique communion that those that suffer for Christ experience with Christ as those that belong to Him. And also, the blessing goes beyond that. In this very own beatitude, Jesus states the blessing for us here, does He not? In verse number 10, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And what He simply says in this passage is, although the persecuted are rejected by the

kingdom of darkness and by the people of this world that yield their lives and powers to the kingdom of darkness, they are received uniquely by God into His kingdom. And they experience a reception into the kingdom of heaven which they do not receive from those on earth. And so, blessed, yes, are those who are persecuted, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Now, persecution is something that was anticipated by our Lord Jesus for the whole history of the Christian church. In John chapter number 15, if you'd like to turn there for a moment, we'll see Jesus', one of His final words to His disciples before He suffered for righteousness' sake, before He suffered for the glory of His name. Look what it says in John 15:18-21. Notice the anticipation: "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. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me." And Jesus plainly, unequivocally makes clear to His disciples that the world will persecute you and hate you. He says they will also persecute you. He says, "But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake."

What Jesus tells His disciples is simply this, that to belong to the kingdom of heaven is to be one who is different from the kingdom of darkness and those who are in the world in such a way that to follow Jesus Christ would mean that the world will not receive you because it did not receive Me. This is what the Lord Jesus Christ tells His disciples, anticipating and projecting, if we could say, forward almost prophetically, of what would be the history of the entire church in relationship to the world. The apostles acknowledged that this was also part and parcel of the Christian life. In fact, Peter says in 1 Peter 2:21, "For to this you were called," called to suffer. Peter says that you were called to this, to suffer for His name's sake. This is part of your calling. This is part and parcel of the Christian experience. Philippians 1:27 says a similar thing. Paul says, "For to you it has been granted on the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on His name but to suffer also for His sake." And what Paul is saying to the church there at Philippi, he says, "It shouldn't be a surprise to you. If God has been so gracious to grant you faith in His name so that you are a partaker of the kingdom of God, then it should be no surprise to you that you also understand that what has also been given to those who believe is the lot of persecution because they believe on the persecuted one, the one who was, who suffered and bled and died at the hands of persecutors."

Now, John 15, if you'd like to look there just briefly again, mentions some-

thing that shows that Jesus has done something that secures persecution for His people. And I know this sounds quite daunting, but I'll try to hopefully make you make sense of it all as we move on. But notice the words, what He says here. He says this in John chapter 15, verse number 19, He says, "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." And so what Jesus is simply saying is this, the fact that I have chosen you to be My disciples, I have brought you out of darkness, I have taken you out of the ungodliness of this world and brought you into the saving grace that I have given to you as My disciples, as My people. He says, therefore, because of that, the world hates you. Therefore, you will be persecuted. Why? Why would they be persecuted? Because God has done something in their life so as to change them. He has called them out of the world. He has changed them that they are no longer, if I could say, accepted in the eyes of those that hate God and despise God. You see, Jesus has so saved them, Jesus has so regenerated, Jesus has so changed them, Jesus has so carried them out of the world to be His own that by doing that, He has created a sort of chemical reaction. Now they are in the world, still in the world, but they're not of the world. And so they don't act like the world. They don't swear. They don't get drunk. They don't commit fornication. They don't live against God. They live holy lives. They live righteous lives. They love their neighbor as themselves. And they love their wives as Christ loved the church. And they submit to their husbands. And they do all the things that the world doesn't do. They submit to their bosses, even though their bosses aren't really good bosses. But they also don't lie. And so when their boss says to them, "Lie so we can get this job," for example, they say, "Oh, sorry, I can't do that. I serve the Lord. I'm not going to lie. I mean, that's a sin."

And there's a chemical reaction, if I could say. There's an uncomfortability that comes into the lives of the people of this world that submits to the kingdom of darkness. And it causes a reaction. It causes opposition. It causes there to be problems that arise as a result of their righteous living. And this is because Jesus has saved them. And this reaction has been the historic testimony of the Christian church. You see, the first three centuries of the Christian church, marked by violent persecution. Here are the disciples of Jesus. Straight away, they're being persecuted as they start proclaiming His name. They're suffering at the hands of the Sanhedrin. They're being beaten. They've been thrown into prison. Saul of Tarsus, who later becomes the apostle Paul, goes about trying to persecute the church of God and kill Christians for the zealousness of his own religion. But in doing so, God meets him on the road to Damascus and saves him. And then he's the one who's persecuted now for the same cause that he was once persecuting others for. And this was the witness of the Christian church. As they went on from there, from Nero to Diocletian, which is in the first three, four hun-

dred years of the church, we have violent persecution. We have Christians that are simply living out the Christian life and are hated by the Romans. They were fed to beasts, wild beasts in open coliseums as a kind of sport for the people to laugh and joke at as they were being fed to wild beasts, lions, and vicious animals. And they did not forsake Christ. They were burnt on the stake, as it were, lighting up the streets by the flames that they were set alight in the streets of Rome. They were falsely accused. Nero accused the Christians of the great fire at Rome when the Christians did not set the empire on fire. They were slandered as incestuous people because they called each other brother and sister. They were slandered. That was not true of them. They were righteous and holy. They treated one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, but they were slandered as incestuous because they called themselves brothers and sisters. They were regarded as cannibals because they ate of the broken body and the shed blood of our Lord in remembrance of Him. And they were regarded by the Romans as cannibals, and they were persecuted and falsely maligned for just living out what their Savior had told them to do. And they went on. The church has gone on being persecuted ever since. In the Middle Ages, the Islamic crusades, basically countless beheadings, causing people to pillaging cities and burning churches and destroying lives, grabbing women, raping them, and taking people to captivity simply because they would not convert to Islam, simply trying to force conversions upon people. And this wasn't only on that side of the Mediterranean, if we could say, but also in the other parts of the world, there was persecution for the sake of Jesus. Wycliffe's Lollards, these ones that believed that the body and blood of Christ did not become the body and blood of Christ. They didn't believe in transubstantiation. They believed it was done in remembrance of Christ. They suffered and were burnt alive at the hands of Roman Catholics for believing that because they opposed saint worship, and they were killed because they desired an English translation of the Bible to be given to all people everywhere. And because they sought men like Wycliffe sought to translate the Bible into the common language of the people so that you and I and all people everywhere might have a copy of God's word in our hands. He was chased and caught and tied to a stake and strangled and set alight. And before he died, you know what his last words were? "Lord, open the eyes of the king of England."

A man who suffered for righteousness' sake. This goes on and continues through the Renaissance and the Reformation era. Countless of pastors that were banished from their pulpits that could not do what we are doing here today, preaching God's word, put in prison, men like John Bunyan that we know of, and other people that had to flee their countries just so they can have some Christian freedom to be able to worship God in the way that they understood the scriptures to teach. People burnt alive for not conforming to the church-state control and governance of the church.

And this has not stopped. Even to the present day, this continues. In fact, people have argued, and there is a case to be made, that there is currently more persecution of Christians in the world today than any other era of Christian history. Currently, 365 million Christians suffer for Christ's name. One in seven that profess the name of Jesus Christ. 5000 Christians were killed last year for their faith in Jesus Christ, directly for their faith and belief in Jesus Christ. Churches were attacked, 14000 of them were damaged and attacked or burned down or destroyed. 295000 Christians were displaced in places like Nigeria, China, India, simply for being Christians, simply for upholding the testimony of Jesus Christ, simply for seeking to submit themselves to the words of their Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in scripture. What was the cause or what is the cause of all this persecution? Well, Matthew 5 tells us here, doesn't it? It says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Verse 11, blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake." And Jesus says here, the cause and the reason for this persecution is for the sake of Jesus Christ. It is for the sake of righteousness that these ones suffer, that Christians have suffered since Jesus has said these things. What is righteousness' sake? That's a really important question to answer. But I think what we should first answer is by the context. We have just been looking at over the past eight or so, or now 10 weeks, I believe, we've been looking at the Beatitudes, which teaches us what true righteousness looks like. Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are meek, those who are merciful and pure in heart, peacemakers, those that seek and hunger for righteousness. These are the ones that are being persecuted for doing so. Persecuted for the sake of Jesus Christ, on account of Him, because of Him, for His name's sake. Simply saying that if it was not for the name of Jesus Christ, they would not suffer. If it was not for a commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ, they would not suffer. This is what Jesus is saying here. The suffering for My sake and the suffering for righteousness' sake is directly linked to all that He has commanded us to do. It is directly linked not to being necessarily a radical revolutionary that seeks about going to try and overthrow a society. This is not what Jesus told us to do. They're suffering for righteousness' sake, for things that are holy, pure, righteous, and that righteousness is like a light that inflames the opposition of the unrighteous. They're not suffering because they're radical revolutionaries taking up a cause for their own sake. This was sadly part of the history of the Anabaptists. A particular group of Anabaptists, they took up a cause in Munster, Germany, and they took up a cause of their own cult-like vision. They had dreams, and they had visions, and they were a cult-like group that encouraged people to sell their property and not to own anything. They encouraged people to marry multiple wives. This cult-like group thought that Munster, Germany, will become the new Jerusalem, and so they sought about to go about and overthrow,

which they did, the government at that time, and they set up this cult society in Munster, Germany. And they suffered for doing that, but I tell you now, they did not suffer for righteousness' sake. They suffered for their own radical cause, which was not aligned to the cause of Jesus Christ.

And so when we talk about persecution for righteousness' sake, we're not talking about radical revolutionaries. We're not talking about arrogant agitators that go about with a contentious spirit, trying to be argumentative or belittling people or being rude or forceful. Someone who is rude and forceful, whether for the name of Christ or not, will receive opposition. You think about it, sometimes, you know, like some of these salespeople that get up in your face, and they really just won't let you go, you know, and they just, they disrespect you, if I could say that. You say no, thank you, and you know, okay, and it's just like, man, you know, I'm sure some of them have been punched in the face from time to time, and they did not suffer for righteousness' sake.

Okay, so there is a manner in which it should be Christ-likeness that results in the cause of our persecution. It should be righteousness that is the reason for our persecution. And what's interesting also is that the kind of persecution mentioned here is not necessarily restricted to bodily harm. Jesus says in this passage in verse number 11, "When they revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake." And so we must also not think that persecution is only about when you're physically harmed. But it also is a result in reviling and speaking evil and false accusations that are made against people for the sake of their obedience to Jesus Christ. To persecute actually doesn't mean to be physically harmed. It actually refers to the idea of being pursued or chased down or driven away. The idea is oppression and harassment, which, when it climaxes, of course, is when those people that are pursuing you grab you and get you and hurt you. But the pain that is received physically is not the only way to say that's persecution. Being persecuted with your mouth or someone persecuting with their lips, reviling you, saying evil against you is also persecution. It's important for us to realize that Luke's rendition of this same passage says this: "Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and revile you and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake." And he goes on to say in verse 26, "Woe to you if all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets." And what Luke is simply saying here is this: look, if everyone speaks well of you, there may be something wrong with you. Because that's what they did to the false prophets. The false prophets that spoke things that people wanted to hear, not what they needed to hear. He says, but others that spoke the truth, and you, if you continue to speak the truth and live the truth and live a life of righteousness, the Bible teaches here that you'll be excluded, reviled, and your name will be cast out as evil for His name's sake.

And so we see here that the cause is righteousness' sake. We also see here it's for His name's sake. We also see here that it is not restricted to bodily harm, but on top of that, we also see that there is a right response to persecution. And look what He says in verse number 12. He says, "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Rejoice! Wow, what do you mean, Jesus? Rejoice and be exceedingly glad? Well, I'm glad that the Lord Jesus just doesn't leave it at that. But He helps us to see some reasons why our response should be rejoicing and gladness. Jesus is not encouraging His disciples to grit it or to ignore it. Neither is He telling them to retaliate against it. He's saying, I want you to learn to rejoice in it. And I want you to rejoice in such suffering because of these various reasons: Great is your reward in heaven. Great is your reward in heaven. Jesus wanted His disciples to understand this, that the sufferings of this life are not to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. He wanted His disciples to understand, as John encouraged the church of Revelation, as the Lord Jesus encouraged the church of Revelation, He said, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." He wanted the disciples to understand that we don't live for reward in the present time. Although God blesses us with many blessings even in this life. But even though all these things may be stripped from us in the time of persecution, realize that there is a reward in heaven. He says, "You belong to the kingdom of heaven. It is your kingdom. It's the kingdom of heaven. You're part of it. So do not look for your reward in this kingdom, but see it in heaven, where the kingdom ultimately shall be fully manifest. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven." That's a cause for rejoicing.

Another course of rejoicing, not revealed in this passage but set up to us in Acts 5:41, is that when the disciples of Jesus Christ were beaten and told not to preach in this name, the Bible says they rejoiced when they left the council, those people that abused them, and it says, "And they rejoiced because they were counted worthy to suffer for His name." The disciples of Jesus said, "Wow, we can walk in His steps. We can suffer for His name. We can suffer for righteousness' sake. He who suffered for us, He who laid down His life for us, we here by obeying Him receive hurt and harm and rejection and ostracization in this world, not for our own sake, but for His sake." They counted it a privilege to suffer shame for His name. Amazing thought, isn't it? How they're so caught up with the kingdom of God and the glory of God.

But also, another encouraging reminder here that He mentions is in verse 12. He says, not only will your reward be in heaven, He says, "For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." What Jesus helps His disciples to understand is this: You, by being persecuted for My name's sake,

are part of a noble succession. The prophets. The sons of the prophets, if we could say. The great people of the children of Israel that took the word of God and spoke it to the people of God. Those that lived lives of holiness and righteousness in line with the law of God that exposed the darkness of apostate Israel at the time of the Old Testament. He says, "You, by suffering for My name's sake, are part of this noble succession. You continue in the lineage of those holy men of old that lived and served My Father's name and suffered and lived and died even for the name of the Lord." He says, "Great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets which were before you."

I want to read to you Hebrews chapter 11, verses 32 to 38. In Hebrews 11, there's the hall of faith, if we could say, where we are told of great people that lived out a life of faith before the Lord. Men of example, men and women of examples, a cloud of great witnesses that testified to us in our running of our race for the Lord Jesus Christ. And look what it says here in verse number 32 to 38, "And what more shall I say? For the time would fail to tell me of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth."

The prophets, suffering for the name and sake of the Lord Jesus Christ, who did not count their lives dear unto themselves but counted the name of their Lord and God as more worthy than their own comfort, more worthy than their own benefit, more worthy than their own security in this life. They lived as those that were pilgrims and sojourners, seeing a city with foundations, whose builder and maker is God, and they pressed in obedience to what they understood of the revelation of God, knowing that their kingdom was not of this world. And they pursued righteousness, and they pressed on in obedience, and they were caught by their oppressors, and some were sawn in two. Daniel was thrown into the lion's den, and the Lord delivered him out because he didn't want to submit to the rule of the Babylonian king regarding that which was evil. He wanted to obey the Lord, and these people suffered, and what the Bible says of them is that the world was not worthy of them. You know why? Because they were not

children of the world; they were children of the kingdom of heaven.

And to them, the reward was not here and now, but was there when their life work was ended, and all was done, and they received the crown of life. And so persecuted they the prophets. Let me tell you a story of two women during the Scottish Covenanters, the days of the Scottish Covenanters. Two Margarets, Margaret Wilson and Margaret McLachlan. Margaret Wilson was 18 years old, and Margaret McLachlan was 70 years old. Two Margarets, Scottish Presbyterian women that loved the Lord, who refused to worship according to the king's rule in the Church of England or the Anglican Church of that time, where the church and state were very much hand in hand together, and the king would impose certain rituals that needed to be practiced in the life of the church and basically overthrow the rule of the own, the Christian liberty that should be had among the people of God. These two women, in good conscience, could not subject themselves to that, and so they refused to swear allegiance to the king with regarding the oath that they should basically bind themselves to the king's rule also in the church. And these two women were caught. Margaret McLachlan, the 70-year-old woman, was looking after Margaret Wilson, and they were caught and put on trial, and they were sentenced to death. And their executioners put them in the ocean. The low tide was there at the time, and the executioner nailed up, they put down a stake in the murky, muddy waters that were low then at low tide, and they tied this seven-year-old Margaret to the stake, and they also took this 18-year-old Margaret Wilson and tied her to another stake over there, just so she could watch the seven-year-old first be drowned when the tide comes in. And as she would watch, the idea is that she would watch this seven-year-old lady, for the sake of Jesus Christ, be drowning as the high tide came in over her head, hopefully she would recant her faith, and she would simply submit herself to the rule of the king. And so the executioner set them up there, and the tide began to increase, and Margaret Wilson saw the waters beginning to gradually rise and engulf Margaret McLachlan, her friend. And one of the soldiers mockingly said to Margaret Wilson, "What do you think of her now?" And Margaret responded, "Think? I see Christ wrestling there. Do you think that we are sufferers? No, it is Christ in us, for He sends none to warfare at their own charges, which they must fight alone." And when the limp form of Margaret McLachlan was being tossed about by the swirling tide and she simply had died, the waters began to engulf Margaret Wilson, but her lips were not silent. She sang the stirring words of Psalm 25, "My sins and faults of youth do Thou, O Lord, forget. After Thy mercy think on me, and for Thy goodness great. God good and upright is; the way He'll sinners show. The meek in judgment He will guide, and make His paths to know." Upon finishing this psalm, she quoted the words of Romans 8, "Who shall separate us from the love of God?" When the waters finally choked her, she was still not dead, and so the soldiers loosed her from the stake, dragged her to the shore,

revived her, and basically confronted her with one more time to do with a demand to pray for the king. And all the villagers that were watching eagerly wished to see her spared from death said, "Pray for the king, pray for the king." And her response was this, that she wished the salvation of all men and the damnation of none. And that if God willed, He would save the king. She said these words, "Lord, give him repentance, forgiveness, and salvation, if it be Thy holy will." But the soldiers were not content with that. They said, "We do not want such prayers." So once again, they attempted to force her to take the oath. Her response was, "No, no, no sinful oaths for me; I am one of Christ's children. Let me go." And they hurled her back into the waters, and there she died and was drowned. These two women, suffering for righteousness' sake, theirs was the kingdom of heaven.

So that's a very severe case of suffering, or do not be deceived, dear people of God, suffering comes in all kinds of ways. There's a woman that Natalie and I had the privilege—she's right now living in Sydney—a woman that Natalie and I had the privilege of leading her to Christ as we were evangelizing 10 years ago. We came to her door, and she let us in, and her husband said—she said, "My husband's not here now, and he hates Christianity, so tell me about the Lord Jesus Christ, and then come back next week." So Natalie and I did that for some four or so weeks or more until this lady professed Christ Jesus as her Savior. She trusted Him as her Lord and Savior, and she started to go to church without her husband knowing because she was fearful that her husband would get upset with her and harm her. And as time went along, her husband caught her going to church and caught her worshipping God, and he was angry, very angry. He was—he basically ostracized her, did not speak with her, did not communicate with her, and basically said, "If you're going to follow Christ, then I'm sorry, this is going to affect our relationship." She humbly submitted herself, continued to cook and clean and care, even though her husband would not in any way talk to her. She continued to work hard and pay the home loans that she was upholding for the family, uh, for the family to help the family go on, and there were home loans that they had to pay. And her husband eventually basically said, "I'm done with this. I'm not going to live with you," basically because she's a Christian. And at this present time, he is taking her to court, seeking to sue her and take the money as much money as he can get, simply because she would not forsake the Lord Jesus Christ. And when he found out that she was baptized, big problems for her.

And this happens today in Sydney, under our nose. It happens in ways like I said, not just physical harm, but verbal assaults. And it's important for us as the people of God not to think that the days of persecution have gone. There is still persecution that God's people suffer in this hour for the sake of His name. In fact, if we understand what's actually being said in this beatitude, we become very challenged at this point, as we have con-

sidered all the beatitudes are the testimonies of those that belong to God. The merciful are merciful because they are God's children, and it proves that we're on the pathway of blessing and that we are entering into the kingdom of heaven. And in this passage, the last of these beatitudes, Jesus said part of the fact that you belong to the kingdom of God, part of the evidence that you belong to God, is that you suffer for His namesake. As much as a mark as being merciful is, or being poor in spirit is, or mourning over sin is, righteousness, living a righteous life in its very nature, as I said, causes a reaction towards unrighteousness, and therefore we incur opposition due to it. This is what it means to be a light in the world or a salt in the earth. There is a sort of impact that comes from true Christian living in the world.

It was John Stott that said this: "Persecution is simply the clash between two irreconcilable value systems." Here is a value system that God has given us, which is His Word and the commands of Jesus Christ, and what John Stott is saying here is true, that this value system is irreconcilable with the value system of the kingdom of this world. And therefore, as God's children, as we uphold the value systems laid for us in the Word of God, as we live according to righteousness, as we hunger and thirst after righteousness, the Bible teaches that the very thing that we hunger and thirst after will be the very cause for our persecution. This is why 2 Timothy 3:12 says, "Yes, and all those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." Persecution is inevitable, dear Christian. Do not be deceived. When you go into your workplace, and there are colleagues of yours that are there, and you are challenged to practice unrighteousness, your job, your boss says, "Hey, make an underhanded deal here," or your friend at work says, "Come on, I want to get a pay rise, can you lie about this?" or "I don't want this to be known," or for example, you're being pressured to do things that are not honest and true, that do not accord with righteousness, right there, when you make your stand for Jesus Christ and say, "No, I will not do that which is sinful," there will be a reaction in your workplace. Not always, but likely in time, maybe that friend will not want to hang out with you anymore. Maybe they'll look at you and despise you. Maybe they'll gossip and backbite you behind your back so as to malign your character and name. Maybe they'll put in a bad word to the boss so that you, uh, get go down in your position, and they go up in this, simply because you did not submit to them.

When we as Christians refuse to participate in ungodliness, whether it's as simple things as drunken parties or immoral jokes or clips that are sent all the time now from people to people that are underhanded, dirty jokes that demise the value of womanhood or of a woman, immorality, you are confronted with an opportunity right there to say, "No, I'm not gonna laugh at that. I don't actually find that funny. These are people that are made in

the image of God." And get ready, that your friend will laugh at you and say, "What's wrong with you, mate? You goody two-shoe Christian, trying to live holy and pure." When we are expected to support the LGBTQ agenda, perhaps by wearing a badge in our workplace or perhaps by signing a certain petition, do not be deceived that this will raise trouble for you. It can be as easy as a hen's night or a buck's night of your best friend's party. You say, "Look, I can't go to that place. It's very immoral. I—I'm not gonna go there." "Ah, you're not a true friend. If you're a true friend, you won't." "Well, I have a wife, and I respect my wife, and—and—and I'm a Christian, and I don't live this way. I don't live in lust and adultery and fornication. This is not the way that I live." And they'll say to you, "Oh, then we don't want to be your friend. Get away from us, you weirdo."

This happens still today. Sometimes, even helping Christian friends to restore them, to love them, can result in opposition, even amongst those that are most dear to you. These things are inevitable. Don't be surprised if the world hates you. Don't be surprised if those that are affected by your righteousness and life and light causes a reaction in your friendships and in your relationships. We must be prepared. Listen, we're living in a day where religious liberties are closing on us, not opening. We pray that they would remain open, but they're becoming more limited. The pressure of the church to conform to the world is stronger now than ever before. The churches are being pressured to make themselves more palatable to society, more palatable to what is common knowledge in media and in other places, to be less weird, if we could say, less different. "Be more like us, and we'll accept you." We find this happening in all kinds of places, and we need to be deceived—we need not to be deceived—because there is very—it's very subtle, persecution. It's very subtle how Satan seeks to overthrow our obedience, if we could say, to the Lord Jesus Christ, and it comes in subtle ways.

Did you know the Romans never said to the Christians, "Deny Christ"? That wasn't essentially the issue. All they simply said to them is, "You can have Christ. You can have your gods. You can have whatever you want. But all you have to do is once a year—once a year, and you don't even have to mean it—offer incense to Caesar and say, 'Caesar is Lord.' That's it. Once a year, you don't even have to mean it. 'Caesar is Lord.' Walk away. Everything will be fine. Just once a year. It's not so bad. You don't even have to believe it in your heart." Christians said, "No, no, we can't do that. Christ is Lord, not Caesar is Lord," and they died for that. They suffered for that.

We went to Vietnam, Natalie and I, several years ago. We've been to China before. You—I was surprised. There are churches in Vietnam. There are churches in China. We think, "Oh, there's no churches." The issue is not

that there are churches. The issue is the state control of the churches and the limitations of the liberties and freedoms of the people of God. And so, Chinese people, Vietnamese people that are Christians for their faith in Jesus Christ, have church underground because they're not churches that have aligned themselves with the expectations of the state. You might say to them, "Why suffer for such things? Just go to one of the state churches. It will be fine." You know what happened? You know why Richard Wurmbrand was arrested? He wasn't arrested because he preached the Gospel. Richard Wurmbrand was arrested and put in prison under the Romanian Communist regime simply not for preaching the Gospel, but because he criticized the government for its persecution of Christians and for its trying to control the churches. They didn't tell him, "Don't speak in this name." They just said, "Don't criticize the government." But part of his Christian witness and testimony to righteousness included the exposing of that which was evil.

Why did John the Baptist get his head cut off? For preaching the Gospel? Not necessarily. Because he pointed out the sin of Herod and said, "It's wrong for you to have your brother's wife." And so, it's important for us to realize that the subtlety of the way Satan seeks for our obedience to be undermined is there, and we must not always be thinking of, "Oh, when I preach the Gospel, if I get persecuted, then that's it." It is for righteousness' sake, and it is for His namesake that we are persecuted.

You say, "Well, I don't experience any persecution in my life whatsoever." Well, the Bible doesn't teach us to hunger and thirst after persecution. That's a very sadistic mentality, and I don't want you to get that idea from this sermon. But what it does teach us to do is to hunger and thirst after righteousness. And the very righteousness that we hunger and thirst after will result in persecution, is what Jesus is saying. So the examination of our lives as to why we don't experience any opposition for the name of Jesus Christ could simply be because we are not seeking righteousness. And I think this is the issue with the Western church. We have bowed the knee to Baal. We have, in one sense, prostituted ourselves to the world. We, as the Christian church generally, have changed our Gospel to a Gospel of prosperity so that man might receive it. We have sought the approval of men and not the approval of God. We have let go of the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and we no longer are fighting the good fight of faith.

And so, if you look at your life and say, "I've never been opposed for anything regarding Christ," and you live in this world, and you live around unbelievers, I ask you this day to examine yourself: Are you living righteously? Are you living holy? For all those who live righteous in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. Whatever shape and form, as I've mentioned here today, but

there will be a reaction. If you let your light so shine before men. Let us pray.