

# OpenTheo

## Persecuted For Righteousness Sake



### The Beatitudes - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses persecution for righteousness' sake, explaining that it means being disliked and rejected for one's faith. He emphasizes that persecution for Christ's sake is spiritually, rather than physically, inflicted by Satan, and highlights that Christians must endure suffering to enter the Kingdom of God, as shown in the Old Testament, by notable persecutors such as Antiochus Epiphanes. Gregg also emphasizes that Christians should not go on a crusade to stamp out sinners, but rather, they should rejoice in their sufferings and pray for God to bring an end to persecution.

### Transcript

Tonight we're turning to the last of The Beatitudes at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. There are eight of them. This is the tenth lecture in our series, and the reason there are ten lectures and only eight Beatitudes is because we had an introductory lecture at the beginning, and we also took two sessions on one of The Beatitudes, Blesser of the Merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

But tonight we're on a different Beatitude, the last one, and it is not only the grand finale of The Beatitudes, but it has a personal application made by Jesus at the end, which he does not do with the previous Beatitudes. We're looking at Matthew 5, verses 10 and 11 and 12. Now, actually, the Beatitude is in verse 10, but Jesus then personalizes it in verses 11 and 12, because the Beatitudes are generic.

Blessed are those who fit the description that Jesus gives, because theirs is, and he gives some benefit, that such people, whoever they may be, will receive. But in this case, after he says, blessed are those who fit this category, he turns around and says, and blessed are you when this happens to you. So he specifically drives this home to his disciples in a more personal application than he does any of the previous Beatitudes that we've studied.

In verse 10 of Matthew 5, Jesus says, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Now, that's the Beatitude, and then he says, and 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. Well, this Beatitude, perhaps, is one of the several in the list that are a little harder for us to accept simply at face value, not because there's anything manifestly untrue about it, but it just doesn't seem that it is a blessing to be persecuted, because persecution by definition means that somebody dislikes you. Somebody rejects you and rejection is never comfortable.

Being disliked is never what we would really naturally prefer. We would rather be popular. In fact, this desire to be popular has led many people who profess the name of Christ verbally at times to backpedal in their profession of faith when in the presence of hostile company, for example, Peter.

As we know, though, he was very adamantly committed to Jesus Christ for the three years of Jesus earthly ministry, yet at the end of his ministry, when Jesus was on trial for his life and Peter was confronted by initially just by a young girl who did not show any necessarily any hostility, but was in an environment where there was a general assumption of hostility toward Christ, since it was where he was on trial for his life. The girl said you were with Jesus and Peter denied it. And this denial of Christ on the part of Peter is surprising, perhaps because of his adamant affirmations that very night that if all would betray him and if all would deny him, yet he would be loyal.

But the very fact that Peter would fall in such a circumstance tells us that none of us is exempt from. The temptation to be accepted, the temptation to be like the the temptation to avoid rejection and persecution, and yet what Jesus is telling us is that persecution for righteousness sake is not a thing to avoid. Now it can be avoided in certain circumstances, and we will talk about those, but it is not to be avoided at the cost of compromise.

You think you can avoid persecution. If it does not require you to compromise your testimony, but there are times when you simply will have no object, no option, excuse me, but to be persecuted because you cannot avoid it without denying Christ or in one way or another. Now, denying of denying Christ can be done more than one way.

Remember, Jesus said in Matthew chapter 10, he that confesses me before men, him will I confess before my father, which is in heaven. But he that denies me before men, him will I deny before my father, which is in heaven. And in Titus chapter one, at the end of that chapter, Paul tells us that there are those who profess to know God, but with their actions and their works, they deny him.

So the denial of Christ can be by word or by deed, and the temptation to deny Christ might be motivated by a variety of things. But in many cases, it is simply the fact that we know that Christ is not well loved in this world. And there are people who actually are

hostile not only to Christ, but to all who will be in favor of Christ and therefore to temper our outward testimony or to deny it or to simply go underground is the temptation.

And I'm not saying there aren't times when it is wise and proper for the church to go underground when when persecution is incessant and official and, you know, extreme and Christians cannot meet publicly, then going underground to be able to continue the work of the church and the fellowship of the church without, you know, being everyone thrown in jail is not. Something that is to be criticized because you don't need to compromise your testimony in order to have secret meetings, even Jesus at the time when he was sought by the chief priest spent much of his time going about covertly, so much so that the chief priest had to hire a defector to let them know where they might find him. And of course, that defector was Judas and Judas led them to the place where he knew Jesus was likely to go, but they had to hire somebody to do that because Jesus was not making himself that easy a target at that particular time in his ministry.

He knew they were out to get him. There was a point in time when it says that Jesus knew that the Jews thought to kill him. So he spent his time in Perea across the Jordan where it was out of their jurisdiction.

So there are times when it is certainly appropriate. To avoid persecution simply by not walking into it, but there's even time when walking into persecution is the will of God. And I, you know, each person has to decide for himself.

I suppose when those times are, there was a man named Polycarp, very famous martyr in the early church in the early second century. He was the bishop of the church of Smyrna, and he was a very old man, very probably the oldest Christian alive in his day, and he had been discipled by the apostle John himself, who is now deceased and the persecution arose in Smyrna of the Christians generally, and because Polycarp was a very visible and well-known Christian, the crowds began to call for him to be burned at the stake. He got wind of this before the police arrived, and he escaped to a hiding place, and they did not find him initially.

However, his hiding place was discovered by a young boy, and he was reported, and he had opportunity again to escape to another hiding place, but he had a dream, and in his dream he was sleeping in a bed that was consumed with flames, and he ascertained from that that God was telling him he was to die a martyr, and therefore he did not escape again when he had opportunity. And when the soldiers arrived to arrest Polycarp, he asked only that he be granted one hour to pray, and so he did. He prayed for an hour, they gave him an hour, and he prayed so fervently, even for those who had come to arrest him, that it is said that the soldiers who came to arrest him regretted having come for him, but they were following orders, and they did take him into the arena to be burned at the stake, and to make a long story short, he was given a chance to deny his faith, which he refused to do.

They put him up to his stake to burn him there, and he was a remarkable martyr, because he seemed to be made of asbestos. The flames came up around him, but would not touch his body for the longest time. Finally, out of frustration, one of the soldiers stabbed him, and the blood that came out from his body put out the fire.

However, after he was dead, they did not find it impossible to burn his body, and his corpse was burned. But here is a case of a man who knew that there was nothing wrong in general with escaping from persecution, and sought to do so initially, but came to the conclusion after a certain point that God called him to die a martyr, and he did not seek to avoid persecution beyond that. There are times when avoidance of persecution is to be desired, and there are times when God desires that we be persecuted.

In fact, Paul said all that would live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution, although if this is true, and certainly must be, since Paul said it, it is certainly not equally true of all people, since we appear to experience but little, if any, persecution in this country. Now we are beginning to experience some mild persecution, and we have been so free of it for so many years in this country that it seems a strange thing to us. However, the scripture says, Do not think it strange when you endure fiery trials.

Peter said that in 1 Peter chapter 4. It is not really a strange thing, and we should not think it strange. What is strange is that we've gone so long without it in a time in a world where Christians in many countries have been put in jail and been tortured and been killed for their faith all through our lifetime. It's just never been here, and we've been a sort of an unusual little bubble of immunity in this country, so that when we read a persecution, when we read a beatitude like this, blessed are those who are persecuted for my name's sake or for righteousness sake.

It seems to us somewhat foreign. It doesn't seem, or else maybe we apply it to the snickers and the mockery that we get maybe from non-Christians on the job or or from the way that the television programs negatively portray Christians or a few things like that, where we start to feel that we're not really appreciated in this world that were persona non grata here. We begin to feel that way, but still, we would certainly be inexcusable whiners if we complain about the degree of persecution we have thus far experienced.

However, greater things may be in store. We do not know, and certainly we have experienced immunity, not because we deserve it. In fact, it seems inexplicable to me why Christians in America, compromised as so many are, have gone so long without having to experience persecution, why we've been so protected.

There may be reasons that could be given for this. I won't take the time to speculate about them. I'd rather talk about the Bible itself says in general on the subject of the persecution of Christians, and it says far more than what we'll be able to say tonight, because it's a very common topic in the scripture.

We won't be able to look at everything that is said, but I'd like to put this beatitude in particular into the perspective of the whole teaching of scripture. When Jesus spoke of being persecuted for righteousness sake or for his name sake, he gave both expressions in the beatitude. It says, Let's remove those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.

And then in verse eleven, blessed are you when they rebound, persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you for falsely for my sake. So the persecution that is here in view is for Christ's sake. It is for the sake of righteousness that this statement is not some kind of a bizarre out of place concept that disappears in the ministry of Jesus for the first time.

It is something that is woven into the very fabric of the whole teaching of the scriptures since the time of the fall. And that is that there is a warfare between good and evil in the world. In fact, going back to Genesis chapter three, as soon as man rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden, there was an announcement made by God of what things could be anticipated in the future.

Among them, he said that in Genesis chapter three, the Lord God said in verse fourteen to the serpent. Who, of course, was at that point the embodiment of Satan himself. He said, Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all the cattle, more than every beast of the field on your belly.

You should go and you shall eat dust all the days of your life, and I will put enmity that is hostility. Between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed, and he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. In this passage, Christians have almost always seen a cryptic reference to Christ, and this is seen as the proto evangelion, the proto gospel, the first gospel presentation in the Bible, because it anticipates the feet of the woman crushing the head of the serpent.

And that seat is recognized by most Christians as Christ. Who would come and crush Satan? And this, of course, he did at the cross. But there is it is more generic as well.

It seems to me what he is saying is there would be now since the fall there will be two sides, two kinds of people, those who are the seed of the woman and who belong to Christ, because he is the ultimate feet of the one. And there will be those where the feet of the serpent. Now, the feet of Satan are mentioned in Scripture from time to time.

Unfortunately, there are some who corrupted the teaching of Scripture and taught what is sometimes called the serpent seed doctrine, which is to be rejected because it is anti Semitic and it is heretical and it has no biblical support in my opinion. But in the New Testament, we are told that there is a class of people who are children of the devil. The feet of the serpent.

Jesus said this to his critics in John Chapter eight in verse forty four. Jesus said, You are

of your father, the devil and the desires of your father, the deeds of your father, you will do. He says he means Satan was a murderer from the beginning and did not stand in the truth.

And what Jesus is saying is that those who were murderous, especially those who were turning a murderous intent toward him to murder him were the children of the devil, the feet of the serpent in first John Chapter three Cain and Abel are presented as the dichotomy of the feet of the woman versus the feet of the serpent, because it says of Cain that Cain was of that wicked one and flew his brother of that wickedness of the devil. Cain was a prototype of the feet of the serpent and he killed his brother. Why? Because his brother was righteous.

So we have here from the very first people to appear on the earth after Adam and Eve. You've got already one who is like the feet of the is the feet of the serpent, as it were not not physically, but spiritually and another who is really the child of God. Abel was a man of faith, according to the book of Hebrews in Chapter 11.

By faith, Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than his brother. So we've got here two kingdoms represented by two kinds of character and at the very beginning of Adam and Eve starting their family. Their first two sons represent these two different kingdoms.

You've got one who is the seed really of God. He's a child of God. He's a man of faith.

Abel. And then you've got one who is of the wicked one, one who is a child of the devil. And so it is in all history from that time forward that all people have fallen into one of those two categories.

All who are not for me, Jesus said, are against me. There's not some third neutral category. He that is not with us is against Jesus said.

So there are those who are Christian or in the Old Testament. They weren't called Christians because Christ not yet come, but there are people of faith. They were the remnants of God's people in the world.

And then everyone else was of the other kingdom. This satanic hostility that was first manifest in the Garden of Eden is manifested throughout Christian history and even Old Testament history. There is a depiction of it symbolically in Revelation chapter 12 where a war is taking place in heaven.

And it says there is a dragon in this in this picture who represents Satan. We're not left in doubt about that because he is so identified in verse nine in Revelation 12 nine. It mentions that the dragon in the picture is the devil and Satan.

But beginning at verse seven, it says war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angel fought against the dragon and the dragon and his angel fought. But they did not prevail,

nor was the place found for them in heaven any longer.

So the great dragon was cast out that serpent of old called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world. He was cast to the earth and his angels were cast out with him. Then I heard a voice saying in heaven now salvation and strength and the kingdom of our God and the power of his Christ have come for the accuser of our brethren who accused them before our God day and night has been cast down and they that is the brethren overcame him.

That is the serpent or the dragon by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Therefore, rejoice, O heaven, and you who dwell in them. But woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you having great wrath, because he knows that his time is short.

And as the battle progresses, we find at the end of that chapter in verse seventeen and the dragon was enraged with the woman who represents, I believe, the remnant of Israel who were saved and followed Christ. And he went to make war with the rest of her offspring who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus. Now, who has the testimony of Jesus? The church does.

Those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus are the church. In this symbolic picture of warfare in heaven, and I believe there is literal warfare, I just don't know that I personally think that warfare is depicted in with a great number of symbols. You are entitled to disagree if you want and take it more literally.

But the point here is there is a spiritual conflict represented as Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon and his angels. This conflict takes place up until the time that Jesus died on the cross. In other words, this conflict probably included Old Testament times and certainly included the time of the life of Christ.

How do I know this? Because when it ends, the devil is cast out of heaven and a voice in heaven says salvation is now come. And the kingdom of God and of his Christ. Well, when did that happen? That happened at the cross.

And if we had any doubt that this is fulfilled at the cross, we have Jesus own words on the subject. In John chapter 12 and verse 31, as he anticipated coming to the cross, he said, now is the judgment of this world. Now show the prince of this world be cast out.

That is, when Jesus died on the cross rose again, the prince's world was cast out. The dragon was cast out and the angels in heaven say now salvation is coming. It certainly has.

But what happened since then? Well, when the dragon found itself cast out, he persecuted the thing and they ultimately overcame him, it says in the vision by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony. They love not their lives unto death. That is

the history of the church from the time of the cross until the present, until the end of time.

The dragon makes war against the woman against the remnant of her seed. Interesting expression, isn't it? In verse 17, the rest of her offspring, the King James, I think it says the remnant of her seed or something like that, the feet of the woman and the dragon makes war with her on an ongoing basis. The persecution of Christian is best understood in the context of this ongoing battle between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of God, the children of God and the children of Satan.

When you come to Revelation 13 and by the way, this is not a study in Bible prophecy, but the book of Revelation is about persecution. It's written to churches that are under persecution and it is a treatise and attract to encourage persecuted Christians. So it's not surprising that persecution is a theme found in it throughout the book, actually, of Revelation.

But it says in chapter 13 that the dragon marshaled the assistance of another one who described as a beast having seven heads and ten horns. Now, there's been many attempts to identify this piece with some individual in history, and again, I will not require that anyone here agrees my interpretation, since so many are available, but I personally think that the beast represents organized political power against the church throughout the church age. Now, that may create problems for your interpretation.

You don't have to follow me entirely that if you want the beast to be somebody in the end times or somebody in the early times of the church, you still work. It still works. But my own understanding is that the beast, the first piece here represents the state that persecutes the church, and that state has taken many forms throughout history, and it is thinly veiled devil in disguise.

Interestingly enough, the beast has the same number of heads and horns as the dragon himself, and it's simply the dragon with political skin pulled over it. And so we have a demonic or satanic manifestation of organized power, politically opposed to the church. And it says of this beast in verse seven of Revelation 13, it was granted to him to make war with the Saints and to overcome them.

OK, overcome them. I thought it said in Chapter 12 and verse 11, they overcame him. Well, they overcome the devil in his direct assault on them as the accuser, the brethren, because they appeal to the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, and they do not love their lives to death.

But notice that's overcoming when you don't love your life to death when you die. When you surrender your life to the flame, when you surrender your body to the gallows or whatever, when you actually die faithful, that is overcoming. But in one sense, this political entity of persecution against the church does overcome the Saints.



That is physically. Persecution is the physical side of spiritual warfare. Did you know there is a physical side? Now, I don't believe there is for us.

We do not wrestle against flesh and blood. That's not for us to do. We wrestle against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age and against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places, according to Ephesians Chapter six.

And also, Paul said in Second Corinthians, Chapter 10, verses four and five, that the weapons of our warfare are not physical. They're not carnal, but they're mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds and casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into the captivity of the obedience of Christ. So we are involved not in a physical warfare, but spiritual.

However, the other side uses both spiritual and physical means. The other side, Satan himself attacks us in spiritual ways with temptation and deception and discouragement and fear and anger and all those things that trouble our spiritual life. But we can overcome both.

But then there is the physical side of the devil's warfare, and that is conducted through the physical entity of the state. In many cases, certainly it is the case in much of the world today, and it was in the days that John wrote. And that is the physical attacks on the physical persons of the faith.

And this is what persecution is. Persecution is a war against Christianity. Now, many times the perpetrators that persecution are not really all that aware that they're involved in some great cosmic struggle that's been involved since the Garden of Eden.

But that's exactly what they are, whether they know it or not. The scripture reveals it to us. Now, the Old Testament, even before Jesus made these comments that those who are separate persecution for right to make sure we have the King or theirs is the kingdom.

The Old Testament indicated that the kingdom will be gained by those who endure suffering for it as well. Apparently, the kingdom is worth suffering for. I certainly agree with that.

But over in Daniel, chapter seven, verses twenty one and twenty two, we won't read the whole context. There's no need to in order to get the basic point. Daniel has a vision this vision includes four kingdoms followed by the establishment of the kingdom of God through Christ.

And he says, and I was watching this Daniel seven. Twenty one. I was watching in this vision and the same horn who represents a persecuting power against the same.

The same horn was making war against the faith. And prevailing against them. That sounds a lot like the beast over in Revelation that it was given him a war against the faith and to prevail against them to overcome them physically, but not spiritually until the ancient of days came and a judgment was made in favor of the same of the most high.

And the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom. Now, notice these things were under attack by the persecuting power and he made war against them and certainly made great strides against them, seemed to prevail against them in terms of driving the faith back physically, driving the church underground, perhaps maybe decimating their numbers as many of the Emperor's did. But notice the faith.

The time came for the faith to possess the kingdom. The kingdom is to be possessed by those who have first suffered for it and those who do not value the kingdom enough to suffer for it are not worthy of it. Jesus indicated also in Daniel chapter eleven.

Similar ideas. Another context. This time it's about a persecutor of the godly in the Old Testament, a man named Antiochus Epiphanes, who persecuted the Hasidim in about one hundred and seventy years before Christ, a very notable persecutor of the Jews.

And in predicting this, Daniel wrote these words in Daniel eleven, verses thirty two to thirty five. He said, These those who do wickedly against the covenant, he this is Antiochus Epiphanes, shall corrupt with flattery. But the people who know their God shall be strong and carry out great exploits.

This is a reference to the Hasidim who resisted him and to the Maccabean Revolt. If you don't know that history, we'll have to talk about that another time. And those of the people who understand shall instruct many.

Yet for many days they shall fall by sword and flame by captivity and plundering. Now, when they fall, they shall be aided with a little help, but many shall join with them by intrigue. And some of those of understanding shall fall to refine them, purge them and make them white until the time of the end, because it is still in a point in time.

The kingdom comes after a time of persecution. This persecution is described as them falling by the sword, going into captivity. Certainly the church has experienced these things.

But even before there was the church, as we know it before the time of Christ, the righteous remnant of Israel experienced these things on occasion at the hands of their pagan oppressors, which is what Daniel talking about here. However, after the time that Jesus had come and when the apostles were preaching the gospel throughout their known world, in Acts chapter 14, we have a summary of what Paul taught to the churches that he established. This is on his first missionary journey.

He and Barnabas are on their way back home from their outward drive of establishing churches. They're now visiting the same churches on their way back to Antioch, from which they had a 1422. It says that what they did is they revisited these churches.

They were strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith and saying, We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is entered through many tribulations, but Jesus has blessed those who are persecuted for righteous sake. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom of God belongs to those who are willing to suffer for it and who are presently suffering for it. Now, in the Old Testament, even before Jesus himself, there were examples of people who suffered first and came into their kingdom later. The most notable, but not the only one would be Joseph and David, both of them almost certainly types of Christ.

There can be no doubt that David is a type of Christ. The New Testament does not identify Joseph as a type of Christ, but it's hard to avoid the conclusion when you study the life of Joseph, that he is in many respects a type and a picture of Christ. But both these men were destined to authority, were destined to a kingdom.

Joseph himself had dreams from God that told him this was his destiny. He had a dream that his brothers bowed down to him, not in the literal form. He had a dream of the eleven stars bowing down to him and the sun and the moon, too.

He also had a dream about his brothers and he gathering sheaths and their sheaths bowed down to his sheep. They understood, and so did he, that this meant someday he would reign over them. However, before that could happen, he was persecuted by them.

They rejected his dream. They rejected God's authority that God was putting upon Joseph over them, and they sold him into slavery, almost having killed him. And even in slavery, he suffered many things, false accusation and wrongful imprisonment.

And even people who are indebted to him, like a butler who he encouraged in prison by interpreting his dream, forgot him and left him to rot for a couple more years. The man suffered a great deal, but he had this destiny that he would reign. And sure enough, when the time came, he possessed the kingdom.

When the time came, he was made second only to Pharaoh, the most powerful man at that time in the world. We see in Joseph a picture of Christ, who also was rejected by his brethren, but who had prophecies over him that he would reign over the whole world, under none other but God, second only to his father. And Joseph went through the same paces that Jesus did.

He suffered. He was rejected. He almost was put to death, as Jesus ultimately was put to death, but he eventually came into the kingdom.

This is an Old Testament concept, and it is, of course, repeated in the new. David is a very excellent example of this principle, because David also was destined to a kingdom. Samuel, the prophet, came and anointed him while he was still a boy, taking care of sheep in his father's pasture and anointed him to be the king of Israel.

However, David did not immediately take the throne. There was already a king in Israel, and when that king who was sold discovered that there was a rival to the throne, David, and by the way, it was not David who was presenting himself as a rival to the throne. It was God who had selected him.

David actually was laid back on the matter and was not really pushing for it, but as soon as Saul perceived that David was to succeed him and replace him and take his kingdom in the providence of God, Saul did not warm to the idea, and he persecuted David. He hurled spears at David. He chased David's armies through the wilderness.

David was persecuted and wandered in sheepskins and goatskins, living in caves and dens of the earth. But the time came when Saul was killed in battle, and through the providence of God, David was raised up to be king, just like very much like Jesus, really. Jesus persecuted and has become the king.

Now, this that the Messiah would go through this is predicted in the Old Testament, probably nowhere more clearly than in Isaiah 53, where we find many familiar verses about the Messiah and how he would be persecuted. And yet he would obtain the kingdom through this means. In Isaiah 53.

Verse three, it says of him, he is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrow and a man to agree, and we hid, as it were, our faces from him. He was despised and we did not esteem him. Skipping down to verses seven and eight, it says he was oppressed and he was afflicted.

He was led as a human, yet he opened not his mouth. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before its shearers is a silent lamb. So he opened not his mouth.

He was taken from prison and from judgment. And who will declare his generation for he was cut off from the land of the living? I mean, he was killed for the transgression of my people. He was stricken.

OK, beat up. Treated badly, killed in verse 12. However, it says, therefore, I will divide him a portion with the great and he shall divide the spoil with the strong because he poured out his soul into death and he was numbered with the transgressors.

He bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors. He is exalted. Having been persecuted, he is exalted to the right hand of God.

He now divides the spoils as a victor does after winning a victory. He is now in charge.

He's king of kings and lord of lords.

He has come into his kingdom. And he declares to us in the person of Jesus, speaking the Beatitudes, that we also have come into his kingdom, but we come in the same way he did through much tribulation. Remember, after Jesus had risen from the dead, but it was not widely known that he had risen.

Even his disciples didn't all know it yet. But Jesus appeared to two men who were on the road to Mass and Luke chapter 24. And the men were sorrowful.

They'd heard that Jesus, they knew that Jesus had died. And they'd even heard a report that the women had come to the tomb and found angels there announcing that he had risen, but they still had their doubts. And Jesus spoke to them and said, oh, well, what do you say? What's the actual word? Let me let me read it to you, because obviously I'm not able to quote it.

Luke 24, 25 and 26. Jesus said, oh, foolish ones and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken, ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory. The question is rhetorical.

Of course, he said, if you knew what the prophets said, if you understood the whole theme of the Old Testament, the Messiah who would reign would first suffer and then enter into his dominion and his glory. So we see that when Jesus said to those who are his disciples, the blessed are you blessed are those who are persecuted for righteous mistake. There is the kingdom.

He was announcing the fulfillment of a concept that was anticipated throughout the Old Testament. The Messiah would suffer and enter his kingdom. The righteous would suffer, but they would all the time would come when they would possess the kingdom.

When do the people possess the kingdom? Well, in one sense, we do now. It's interesting that all the other Beatitudes say blessed are. And then he gives a category of people he says, because they shall.

And he gives, you know, their destiny. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the merciful.

They shall obtain mercy. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst. They shall be satisfied.

It's all future. This is what they can look forward to. But of those who are persecuted, righteousness is theirs is the kingdom.

They already possess it. The kingdom has been delivered to them, and they are possessors of it. Now, that doesn't mean there's no more of it to be had than we have

now.

We have the kingdom now. And remember what Paul said the kingdom is in Romans chapter 14 and verse 17. Paul said the kingdom of God is not food and drink.

He said the kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. That's what the kingdom is. And Christians possess that now righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

The only thing that will be different when Jesus returns will be that he will universalize this phenomenon right now. Those who are subjects of his and who are suffering for their loyalty to him, they possess righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, but they live in a world that is not characterized by righteousness or peace or joy. And that is what we look forward to when Jesus comes back, his kingdom, which now exists and is possessed by the saints, will become the universal reality of the whole world.

Because all opposition will have been put down. However, those who are currently persecuted are persecuted because they are possessors of this kingdom. And there is another kingdom that has historically made war against it.

The devil was not pleased at all when Jesus arrived here. He tried to have him killed. Remember Herod tried to kill all the babies.

That was not that was not without satanic inspiration. In fact, Revelation 12, which we were looking at earlier, depicted as the dragon standing by the pregnant woman ready to eat her child as soon as he's born. But he misses him.

He misses his target and the child survives and eventually caught up to the hand of God and is to rule the nations with a rod of iron. So the dragon picks on his loyal followers instead. But the point here is when Jesus came, he invaded the kingdom of darkness and he planted another kingdom in rivalry to it.

That's why those who heard the apostles preach. In Berea or Thessalonica, excuse me, in Thessalonica, in Acts 17, they characterize the gospel message that these men are teaching decrees contrary to Caesar teaching that there is another king, one Jesus. Well, they got that part right.

They certainly did teach that there is another king, one Jesus and Caesar, who was at that time the beast, the satanic persecutor of righteousness. He was threatened just like Herod had been earlier. And those threatened persecutors of the church persecuted Christ and they persecuted those who declared that Christ is king.

So there is this war of the kingdoms and it is the context of this war that gives perspective and and proper context, understanding persecution of Christianity ever since the time of Christ. Now, there are reasons why the world persecutes Christians. Have you

ever wondered why they do when you read of Muslim terrorists in where Somalia or somewhere, you know, various places around the world that, you know, they come and they just they invade Christian villages and just wipe out massacre people or why communist countries have tried to eliminate Christianity and done thorough purges of all the spiritual leaders that they could get their hands on.

I mean, why is it that there's so much hostility toward these people? Are these really bad people? Are these Christians criminals? Are they threatening everybody? Are they going around disturbing the peace? Why does why do people hate Christians? Now, I don't mean to be overdramatic, because some people who aren't Christians might come tonight and say, well, what are you talking about? People hate Christians. I'm not a Christian. I don't hate Christians.

You Christians are paranoid. You think everyone hates you. You think everyone has to get you.

Well, according to Scripture, although it is not the case that every non-Christian would like to kill every Christian, there is indeed a war. And there are children of Satan who hate Christians and they hate them for reasons that seem on the surface inexplicable until you look deeper. Jesus explained why it is that his disciples are hated by the enemy.

He said it in John chapter 15 and verse 19. In John 15 and verse 19, Jesus said, 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.

If you were of the world, if you share in the world's spirit, in the world's goals, in the world's values, they wouldn't criticize you. They wouldn't persecute you. They wouldn't hate you.

They'd love you because you would be one of their own. But he says, because I've called you away from all of that. I've called you to renounce the world, to renounce its values, to renounce its treasures and renounce its goals and its ambitions.

You renounce it, you are essentially condemning it by that renunciation. You know, in Hebrews chapter 11, there's an interesting statement about Noah and his generation. It says in Hebrews 11, seven, by faith, Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness, which is according to faith.

Noah condemned the world. How? By building an ark. By building an ark, he condemned the world.

How so? Well, he stood out like a sore thumb in his generation. He did what God told him to do. The rest of the world ignored what God wanted and his very obedience condemned the behavior of those who were disobedient.

You see, you cannot really be neutral about God. God's claims are absolute on your life and on every area of your life. If you submit to them, then you must obey him.

But if a person will not obey him, they are threatened by those claims. Actually, the unbeliever is much comforted if they never meet anyone who's obeying God. Because they don't want to obey God, and it's easier for them to live with their conscience if they never meet anyone who obeys God.

I mean, we tend to compare ourselves with others. And if everyone we know is pretty much a sinner, pretty corrupt, pretty disobedient to God, then the fact that we are disobedient to God doesn't feel so bad. We don't feel too much out of our element.

But when somebody enters the room who obeys God and rejects our sinful pursuits and our sinful values, suddenly we look dirty by comparison. When one clean person walks in, you know, if everyone's covered with mud and grief, no one feels very dirty. But as soon as one person with clean clothes and clean hands and a clean heart walks in, suddenly everyone else looks real dirty by comparison.

And therefore, the world hates those who do not follow its ways, who've been called out of it, because the very coming out of the world, as soon as you say, I'm sorry, I can't go to that party anymore. I'm sorry, I can't drink with you anymore. I'm sorry, I don't do that anymore.

You might be insane that to people you might be in a way. You know, very kind and very gentle and very amicable in your manner, but no matter how amicable you are in the way you say it, your very words are condemning what they are doing. That's why we get accused of being so judgmental.

You say, why do people call us judgmental? We're let the world do what they're going to do. I mean, we those of us who preach the gospel do confront the world about its sins. But the fact of the matter is, most Christians are not really out on some kind of crusade to stamp out sinners.

And yet sinners feel so judged. They feel so condemned, even if you've never had a thought of condemning them. And of course, the reason is because by the very turning from the ways that they live and your rejection of those things, you are by that act stating that you believe those ways are wrong.

That's why you don't do them anymore. You are saying that is not OK. That's not the right way to live.

And that very obedience to God condemns those who continue to disobey God. The world hates that. Now, there's a couple of reasons the Bible gives why the world is uncomfortable, why the world persecutes and hates the church.



The first is just a basic rebellion of mankind against God and God's authority in general. In Psalm chapter two, we have a very graphic description of this general attitude in the psalm. It is the kings of the earth who are depicted.

But really, the attitude of the kings of the earth in this psalm is that essentially of all rebels against God. You don't have to be a king to fit this description. In Psalm two, it says in verse one, why do the nation's rage and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed.

By the way, the word the word anointed is Christ in the side. They set themselves against Jehovah and against the Christ. By the way, this scripture is quoted by the apostles in Acts chapter four, and they substitute the word anointed.

They use the word Christ when they quote it. The the kings of the world and the people, they are set against God and against Christ. Why? They say, let us break their bonds and pieces and cast away their cords from us.

That is the rulers of the world and for that matter, most of the peons in the world, too. They don't like the bondage of God telling them what they must do and what they must not do. Let's get his chains off us.

Let's cast his cords as far from us as we can. Let's liberate ourselves from the authority of God. Well, that's the rebel nature of man.

And, you know, the Christian is the person who who who knew that rebellion also, but repented and said, well, you know, rebellion, it's got a real bad thing to do. I think I'll stop doing it. And I turn around and start following Jesus instead of rebellion.

But as soon as I do so, especially if I in any sense represent Christ and preach the gospel to people as I should, especially I am imposing on them the authority of Christ by my very preaching. How can one preach the gospel without saying to people, you need to repent of your rebellion against God? You need to obey Jesus Christ. You cannot preach the gospel biblically without that information.

And the people don't like that. There are people who just don't want any authority over them, least of all the authority of a holy God who condemns everything that they love. And commands everything that they hate, that kind of authority does not appeal to the wicked.

Now, this is what is meant when Jesus said in verse 12 or 11, bless you when they persecute you and revive you and cast out your name is evil for my name's sake. This is being persecuted because you stand for Jesus, for his name's sake. The people who hate Jesus end up hating you because you are for him and you are promoting him and you are basically imposing upon them the claims of Christ.

And you cannot live your life without doing that, even if you never preach the gospel. If you live a holy life and you say, well, I do this because I'm a Christian following Jesus Christ, it imposes on their conscience the claims of Christ that they are rejecting. That is an uncomfortable situation for many, and that leads to persecution.

Another thing that is a reason the Bible gives is it's not just that they are opposed to the authority of God in their life. They resent righteousness. This we are told in 1 John 3 verses 11 through 13.

This is a passage about persecution of the righteous, and it gives basically it reveals the motive of many who persecute the church in 1 John 3 verses 11 through 13 says, For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain, who was of that wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own works were evil and his brothers were righteous. Do not marvel my brethren if the world hates you.

Cain is put here as a prototype of the world itself and Abel a picture of us. Cain hated Abel. Why? Because his own works were evil and his brothers were righteous.

The contrast was embarrassing, shameful, convicting. As I said earlier, the very living of a righteous life condemns the lifestyles of those who do not live it. In 1 Peter chapter 4, we have the same idea presented here in verse one.

Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind that is that you're prepared to suffer in the flesh as well. For he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin. What he means by this is the person who is suffering for righteousness sake is suffering because he has given up his life of sin that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

You've stopped living in sin. You've stopped trying to please men, and you're not trying to please God that bothers people. It says, for we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles when we walked in licentiousness, lust, drunkenness, revelry of drinking parties and abominable idolatry in regard to these.

They think it's strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. They think you're strange because you don't run any longer in the same path they're in, and therefore what's left for them to do? All they can do is speak evil of you or else repent themselves. They either have to demonize you and make you look like some kind of a dangerous weirdo or else they in which case they feel OK about themselves or else they have to admit that you're really doing the right thing and they're still doing the wrong thing.

You're not running with them anymore, but they're still running the way that people ought not to run in the same flood of dissipation. It's resentment against righteousness.

So Jesus talks about being persecuted for my name's sake, but he also talks about being persecuted for righteousness sake.

There is a difference, but it's close. When you stand for Jesus, you'll stand for righteousness. But some people hate you because they hate Jesus.

There are other people who might not even care who Jesus is. They just they hate righteousness because it condemns their way of life. In any case, the presence of holiness and goodness and righteousness and a witness for Jesus.

Threatens the devil and the devil has people who who the desires of their father, they will do now if you are hated for righteousness sake or for Christ's sake, it is different than being hated for being unpleasant. Or for being untactful or for being obnoxious, there are Christians who go out on the streets and witness and scream in people's ears and and force tracts upon people who are not interested in the book and they get themselves persecuted. People throw things at him or call them names, whatever, and they go home thinking I've been persecuted for righteousness sake.

I rejoice in this. But in many cases, it's not righteousness, but simply plain obnoxiousness that has led people to reject what they have to say and to treat them badly. It says in.

First, Peter, Chapter four and verses 14 and 15, if you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you that simply a restatement of the blessed are those who are persecuted for Christ's sake. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you for the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you on their part. He's blaspheme, but on your part, glorified.

But let none of you suffer as a murder, a thief, an evil doer or a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. If you suffer as a Christian because you're a Christian, that's great.

If you suffer because you're doing things that are unacceptable legally or simply socially or you're just obnoxious, there is no glory in that similar idea in a different context. Given in first Peter, Chapter two, we're talking about servants in this case. But he says, for what credit is it if when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But if when you do good and suffer for it, you take it patiently.

This is commendable before God. It's commendable if you're persecuted for doing what's good and you take it patiently. But it's not commendable if you're beaten for not doing what's good.

If you suffer for righteousness sake, it is a blessing. Now, what are Christians supposed to do when they suffer for righteousness sake? There are many things. And in the time we have, I cannot go into them in detail.

Let me simply go over them and give you the scriptures. First of all, in the face of persecution, flight or running away is permissible. Jesus said in Matthew 10, 23, when they persecute you in one city, flee to the next.

We certainly see this in Paul in Acts, Chapter nine, verse 23 through 25. Paul is the city is surrounded. They're seeking him to kill him.

And he escapes out a window of the wall in a basket to escape persecution by flight. When this is possible is legitimate. And the scripture allows it.

However, forcible resistance against your persecution is not permissible. Jesus said in Matthew 5, 39, do not resist the evil man. The man strikes you on one cheek, turn to the other also.

In James, Chapter five and verse six, it says to those who persecute Christians, you have condemned and murdered the just and he does not resist you. This is the righteous man's response in the Bible. He does not forcibly resist persecution, though he is entitled to run away.

There's a misspelled word here, but the second thing to do is to remember Jesus in Hebrews, Chapter 12, verses one through four, we're told to run the race with diligence and to look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame. He says you have not yet suffered under the shedding of blood in resisting sin. Jesus did consider him who endured such contradiction from sinners, lest you also become weary in your mind.

Think about Jesus. He's the model. He suffered more than you have.

You haven't suffered under blood yet. And even when you have, if that happens, you haven't gone further than he has gone. He is the goal.

He is the one we're seeking to be like. Keep your eyes on him and run this race with endurance. We are told another response persecution is to rejoice.

Jesus said that in Matthew 5, 12, rejoice and be exceedingly glad when this happens for great is your reward in heaven. The parallel in Luke, Chapter six, says actually jump for joy, leap for joy when this happens, when you persecuted. Why? He says, well, for one thing, you are in good company with the prophet and the holy men of the past.

This is the right company to be in. You can rejoice because the hostility of wicked men is a compliment. To be popular with all people is not desirable.

In Luke, Chapter six, Jesus said, well, and you and all men speak well of you. There are some people whose whose favor towards you is an insult. Because they are so corrupt in what they approve, what they disapprove, the rejection of certain corrupt people is a

flattery.

In fact, we read in Acts, Chapter 5:41, that the apostles went from the presence of the council after having been beaten by the enemy. It says they went away rejoicing that they've been counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus. They rejoiced that they were kind of worthy by whom? By the council themselves.

The council counted them to be worthy to be suffering shame for the name of Jesus, because they were as much like Jesus. As Jesus was. And they hated Jesus, so they hated those who are like him.

If people who hate Jesus don't hate you, there's something wrong with you. You don't resemble Jesus enough. Whatever it is they hate on him, they should hate about you.

If you're like him, rejoice when you're persecuted, because that's a flattery. That means they see enough of the same thing that they don't like in Jesus in you. That's a compliment.

Peter tells us that suffering for Jesus gives us opportunity to glorify God. Why? Well, for one thing, when Christians suffer for their faith, they bear testimony to the fact that Jesus is worth suffering for. Many people do not have a philosophy or a loyalty in their life for which they would be willing to suffer because they haven't found anything worthwhile.

When you suffer for Christ faithfully, you testify to the world Jesus is worth suffering for, even dying for. That glorifies God. Another thing you're to do according to Matthew 5:44, when people are persecuted, is bless them, do good to them and pray for them.

This is also repeated in Romans 12:17-21. Also, in addition to praying for them, it is appropriate to pray for ultimate vindication of God's people in the midst of persecution. To pray that God will vindicate the righteous and will bring an end to persecution is legitimate.

We find the saints in heaven, the disembodied souls of the martyrs, praying this very thing in Revelation 6:9-11.