

Session 8: Matthew 5:10–12

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: We can expect persecution for our relationship with God, but we can rest in the hope of God's coming kingdom and our heavenly reward.

Head Change: To know that when we are in a right relationship with God, we will encounter hostility from people who do not know him.

Heart Change: To feel confident in the face of persecution, knowing that ours is the kingdom and there is a reward waiting for us in heaven.

Life Change: To embrace a right relationship with God even at the risk of persecution because a great reward awaits us in heaven when we endure.

OPEN

"Blessed are those who are _____, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs."

How do you think most people would fill in the blank above? How would you fill in that blank?

Many of us might complete that statement with a word like "rewarded" or "happy," but Jesus declares something altogether different: "Blessed are those who are *persecuted* because of righteousness." It seems backward to us, but one of the ways we encounter God's blessing is through persecution.

While none of us wants to be persecuted, it is very likely that we will be. But it isn't something to be afraid of. In the last session of our study on the Beatitudes, Matt will show us the kind of persecution that brings God's

[illegible]

blessing and the fuel that helps us endure those difficult times.

READ

Read Matthew 5:1–12. Whether you have memorized all eight Beatitudes or are reading them for the first time, think of ways to remind yourself of these kingdom qualities beyond this study.

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Matt's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

Why does the world see Christians as a barrier to progress?

What are the three reasons we will experience persecution?

Why can the final Beatitude be considered a double Beatitude?

Show Session 8: *Matthew 5:10–12* (13 minutes).

DISCUSS

Matt mentioned that over the last three to five years, he has noticed a change in tone toward Christianity in the United States. He described it as a move from “indifference” to “slight hostility.” **In what ways have you seen the change in tone in your community? In what ways has it affected you?**

[Note: For further study on the cost of following Jesus, see **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this session.]

There is a popular assumption today that society should always be moving toward a more progressive, better future. But many view Christianity and its values as a “barrier to progress.” **What are some Christian beliefs that our culture considers barriers to progress?**

[illegible]

In a society and culture whose values are changing so rapidly, and in such contrast with Christian values, the prospect of being persecuted for your Christian faith is becoming more of a reality. **How would you define the word persecution? Have you ever personally experienced persecution? What was that like?**

It is easy to assume that every form of resistance we encounter is a type of persecution that Jesus blesses. But in Matthew 5:10, Jesus only blesses those who are persecuted for being in right relationship with him.

What behaviors might we engage in that earn ill-treatment from others, but wouldn't be considered "persecution"? What can we do to ensure that any mistreatment we receive is because of righteousness and on account of Jesus?

Matt listed three reasons why we will be persecuted. First is that our presence exposes sin and darkness. **Has your presence ever been interpreted as hostility? How did you respond to that situation?**

The second reason we can expect persecution is because our righteousness will cost those who seek to gain money, power, or influence in sinful ways. **What are some examples of how people profit from unrighteousness? In what ways could your relationship with Jesus threaten someone's ability to gain from his or her unrighteousness?**

The third and final reason why we can expect hostility is because we “speak righteousness.” **In what ways do you talk about being in a right relationship with God? Why do you think that threatens people?**

When we talk about and practice what we believe, we may be seen as fools and possibly, at worst, extremists. **Why do you think we might be seen as fools or extremists? What are some examples where these labels are already being applied to Christians in our culture?**

What is an appropriate, God-honoring, way to respond to people calling us foolish, hateful, or even extremists?

[illegible]

LAST WORD

The Beatitudes give us a glimpse of what it looks like to live in God's kingdom. What at first seems like an upside-down way of living is actually right-side up. The Beatitudes are the way to "the blessed life," to the life of flourishing, to life as God intended it.

So, embrace the way of the kingdom—the pooriness of spirit, the mourning, the meekness, the hungering and thirsting for righteousness, the mercy, the purity of heart, the peacemaking, and, yes, the persecution—for the kingdom of heaven is yours.

GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where the following segment could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use this section as a short devotional to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider reading this section to deepen your study of the Beatitudes.

1. *The Cost of Following Jesus*

In the closing lines of the Beatitudes, Jesus broaches the topic of persecution, but the opening lines of the Sermon on the Mount aren't the only time Jesus addresses persecution. In the Gospel of John, Jesus assures his followers that we will be treated much like he was. That means when we are persecuted, we can deeply identify with Jesus. We can know that we belong to him and his kingdom.

Read John 15:18–21. **In what ways does Jesus’s promise of persecution surprise you?**

According to Jesus, it is inevitable that following him will bring us hate and persecution. **In what ways has following Jesus caused you to be the recipient of**

mistreatment? Is this cost of following Jesus one you are willing to pay?

In what ways, if any, have you tried to avoid persecution for following Jesus?

Jesus shared this promise with his disciples to prepare them for hate and persecution. When we expect persecution, we will not be surprised when it appears and can face it with calm preparedness. **In what ways could you prepare yourself not just to understand why you're being persecuted, but to respond appropriately to being persecuted?**

Persecution is one of the costs of following Jesus. And when we are persecuted for our righteousness, we can rejoice because we are following in the way of our savior and can look forward to our reward in heaven.

Even when you are persecuted, resolve not only to remain faithful to Jesus but also, like Jesus, to actively love those who are mistreating you. **What would it look like to show Christlike love to people who persecute you because of your relationship with God?**

2. Responding to Persecution

The Bible assures us that we will encounter persecution. So, instead of wondering *if* or *when* it'll come, we would be wise to consider instead *how* we'll respond when it does. When we look at the life of the apostle Peter, we see a man who both crumbled under the pressure of persecution and persevered in his faith. His example will show us how to endure and where to find grace when we fail.

Read Matthew 26:69–75.

While Jesus was being tried by the Sanhedrin, Peter was identified as one of his followers. He was justifiably afraid—being associated with Jesus could have gotten him arrested, beaten, or worse. **How did Peter respond to those who accused him of being a follower of**

Jesus? How would you have reacted if you were in Peter's place?

To avoid persecution, Peter denied ever knowing Jesus. He rejected everything he claimed to have believed because he was afraid. **When, if ever, have you tried to avoid persecution as Peter did? After that situation ended, how did you feel? In what ways do you think your avoidance of association with Jesus affected your relationship with him?**

After Jesus's crucifixion, Peter returned home and took up his old trade. He was fishing in the same place where Jesus found him, almost as if his experience with Jesus had not changed his life at all. Read John 21:1–9, 15–19.

When we think of the ways we have rejected Jesus, we sometimes imagine that God has turned from us or, at the very least, is disappointed and upset with us. But in this passage, Jesus seeks Peter, feeds him, and forgives him. **Do you think that your failures make God disappointed or ashamed of you? If so, what would change if you knew that God wants to restore you?**

What would it look like to commit anew to Jesus and follow him?

Records tell us that Peter endured a great deal of persecution and died a cruel death—but he did so while remaining faithful to Jesus. In his first epistle, we find a changed Peter, a man no longer afraid of persecution, but steadfast and sure of his relationship with God.

Read 1 Peter 4:12–16. In what ways are Peter’s words different in this passage than they were in Matthew 26?

The apostle Peter—the one who had betrayed Jesus and fled from persecution—is now writing encouraging the church to be steadfast. He is a new man. **Reflect on the transformation that took place in Peter. In what ways does his transformation—the man famous for**

**rejecting Jesus becoming a pillar of the church—
encourage you?**

Peter abandoned Jesus on the night Jesus was arrested, he denied Jesus repeatedly, and he returned to his old life. Can you imagine how ashamed and unworthy he must have felt? But Jesus sought him out and welcomed him back as his disciple. Peter's failure did not define him—Jesus did.

Have you run from persecution? Have you cowered under the threat of mistreatment, unkindness, or hostility? Do you fear that you've forfeited the blessing that Jesus pronounces in his final Beatitude? Jesus will welcome you back. Run to him.

RightNow Presents The Beatitudes
STUDY GUIDE

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