

Beautiful Attitude #3 (Matt 5:1-12)



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

- a. Jesus' Honesty - One of Jesus' virtues we rarely talk about is His honesty. Jesus never entertained false hope or illusion. Sometimes we hear testimonies or preaching that imply that Christian life is a bed of roses. Jesus said, *'In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.'* (John 16:33) Jesus promised the cross before the crown. So did the apostles. Jesus said, *'If you desire to follow Me, you must count the cost. It will cost you everything.'* Jesus was absolutely honest with His would-be followers. They must count the cost upfront. The only way to the crown is the cross. *'If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself and pick up his cross daily and follow Me.'* (Luke 9:24)
- b. Certainty of Persecution – There is no special blessing when we are disliked because we are unpleasant, offensive, judgmental, or self-righteous. But if we truly pursue the seven virtues of the Beatitudes, then the eighth blessing will follow - persecution. *'Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.'* (2 Tim 3:12) Why? Because you are so different from the world, so the world will disown you. You will disturb their conscience. You will remind them of Jesus whom they've crucified. Your presence will hinder them from spreading darkness. Man is in rebellion against God, and so the closer we walk with Christ and the more we look like Him, the more hostility we will draw from the unrepentant world. Why did they hate Jesus so much? *'But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, 'They hated Me without a cause.'* (John 15:24)
- c. Reason for Rejoicing - But Jesus said, *'Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake - because you stand where I stand - rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.'* Rejection and false accusations cut deep into our soul. So how can we rejoice when we are unjustly persecuted?
 - (i) It is proof you are sufficiently different from the world, and a worthy target of the devil.
 - (ii) It purifies your faith (1 Pet 1:6-7). Great saints arose in the time of persecution - the apostles and the prophets in OT and NT. Which of God's prophets did not suffer? What is the calling of a prophet? *To share in the sufferings of God. Thus, also they share in the secrets of God.*
 - (iii) When you begin to suffer for Jesus, it is the strongest proof that God's hand is upon your life and your reward is piling up in heaven. It is a compliment from Jesus - He counts you in the line of His holy prophets. *'So they [the apostles] departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.'* (Acts 5:41) Special crowns are kept for those who suffer for Christ - the imperishable crown (1 Cor 9:24-25), the crown of rejoicing (1 Thess 2:19), the crown of righteousness (2 Tim 4:8), the crown of glory (1 Pet 5:4), the crown of life (Rev 2:10).

2. You are the salt of the earth

Jesus told us what the world will do to us when we truly follow Him – they will persecute us. Now Jesus is telling us what we will do to the world when we follow Him.

- a. Salt symbolises covenant (Lev 2:13), loyalty and friendship (Mark 9:50), gracious speech (Col 4:6), flavour enhancer in food (Luke 14:34), and disinfectant for dunghill (Luke 14:35), etc.
- b. Two functions of salt: *'[if the salt loses its flavour] It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out.'* (Luke 14:35) In Jesus' days salt was used as :-
 - (i) Disinfectant on the dunghill (primitive outdoor toilet) or the field to stop the infection from spreading.
 - (ii) Fertilizer on the land to enrich the growth of crops. In those days, rich mineral soil was scraped from the Dead Sea for farming.

Salt stopped the spread of infection, and grew rich crops. And we do not need a large quantity to influence the world. All it takes is a 'pinch of salt' to flavour the food. So how does salt lose its flavour? In Jesus' days, salt was only about 70% pure, and they were kept in small piles in storehouses. If water or moisture

got into the salt pile, salt would bleed out leaving white chalky powder that looked like salt but with little real salt content. Once the saltiness was gone, it was good for nothing. It was literally thrown out and walked all over by people on the streets.

Jesus warns that a Christian who compromises with the world and loses his moral and spiritual distinction is of no use to this world. The world has no respect for Christians who look just like them. True Christians will be both persecuted and respected by the world. They will despise worldly Christians and trample on them. Which would you rather be? To be persecuted and respected by the world? Or be despised and trampled on by the world? Jesus said, *'Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets.'* (Luke 6:26). The false prophets represented everything the world ran after.

- c. The biggest hindrance to the Christian witness in any nation is always a large number of compromising Christians who are despised by the world because they are no different from them. This is the unfortunate state of the postmodern Christian world. This cycle of destruction - the last generation must break.

3. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden

Again, it does not take much light to expel the darkness. A flickering light (of an ancient oil lamp) in the wind may seem weak, but it is sufficient to light up dark streets. The Church is the lampstand in the world that burns with the presence of God. (Lampstand = *'Luchnos' // 'Luchnia'*, 7 churches in Rev 1:20). Jesus said, *'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.'* In the last days, such churches must arise. (Lev 6:24 - C.f. Moravian movement, Francis Metcalf - *'Ladies of Gold'*)

4. Eternal Reward

- a. Jesus starts with 'blessing' and finishes up with 'reward'. One of the great challenges in following Jesus is keeping our hearts strong and encouraged through the journey. Not to be discouraged when we feel powerless and ineffective, facing rejection and false accusations. Is it worth the sacrifice? Jesus promised following Him is a narrow and difficult path, but our reward will be worth far more than all our suffering and sacrifice. Jesus taught on the eternal reward more than anyone. *'Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.'* (Rev 22:12) He is not coming emptyhanded. His coming means judgment for the world, but for His saints who long for His appearing – eternal reward.
- b. 7 Rewards (7 'R's) – godly expectation of reward is an important Christian hope.
- (i) Responsibility - if you are faithful in little you will receive more. Apostle Paul's first ministry was delivering offering collection. Some will have responsibility over 10 cities. (Luke 19:11-27) *'But the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him.'* (Rev 22:3-4)
 - (ii) Riches - eternal inheritance and treasures in heaven that are inflation-proof. *'Inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.'* (1 Pet 1:3-4)
 - (iii) Rest - the absence of conflict, to be at ease, and to do what you really love doing (Rev 21:1-4). Dwelling in the mansion in God's city (John 14:2-3; Heb 11:16). So dwelling in a tent in this life is ok!
 - (iv) Rejoicing - Deep unending happiness and lasting joy (Matt 25:20-23; Rev 19:7-9; 22:1-5)
 - (v) Radiance - We will shine and radiate God's burning glory (Dan 12:2-3; 1 Cor 15:40-42; Rev 21:11, 23)
 - (vi) Renown - We will be crowned with honour. Loral wreaths in this life shrivel and die. Crown God gives us on that day will be glorious forever. (1 Cor 9:24-25; 1 Thess 2:19; 2 Tim 4:8; 1 Pet 5:4; Rev 2:10)
 - (vii) Royalty - We shall reign with Christ as a royal priesthood (Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6; 1 Pet 2:9). Royalty is forever, incorruptible, and assured. Our labour of faith is not in vain.

5. Questions

1. Can you give yourself a mark from 1 to 5 on each of the spiritual qualities below? (5 = highest score)
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|----------------|-------|------------|---------------|
| Poor in spirit | Mourn | Meek | Righteousness |
| Merciful | Pure | Peacemaker | Persecuted |
2. Have you suffered persecution because of Jesus? How did you respond? Did you consider yourself blessed?
3. How real is Jesus' promise of reward to you? Which of the 7 R's encourages you the most?