

Privileged to Suffer

The Beatitudes

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Bible Verse: Matthew 5:10-11
Preached on: Tuesday, August 29, 2023

Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 5. Matthew 5:10 and 11 and 12, as we've come to the eighth and final Beatitude, and it's gone all too quickly, in my opinion, going through these things. Matthew 5:10 reads,

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

This is, in my opinion, a very interesting capstone to the Beatitudes because in one sense you really wouldn't expect what has preceded it to lead to this conclusion. If someone is humble in spirit and is hungering and thirsting for righteousness and is pure in heart and a peacemaker, well you wonder why on earth would anybody be opposed to that? Why would that provoke opposition from the world? And we're going to answer over the course of two messages, tonight and next Tuesday, we're going to answer six questions about persecution from these texts. I'll ask a question and then I'll answer them. But as I look out on your faces, kind of imagine those that are watching over the live stream in light of the day in which we live, these are very critical verses for us to study, to come to grips with, to internalize, and to embrace. This is preparation. This is training camp. This is boot camp for what certainly lies ahead for true believers. And I know that some of you are facing great difficulties and great challenges and ethical questions in the workplace as you work for major corporations that lay down certain requirements for diversity and inclusion and things like that that are anti-Christian, and speaking with those of the law enforcement community, I've had a number of conversations in recent weeks with members of the law enforcement community and just knowing the challenges that await as more and more ungodly principles are put into place, it's going to be difficult for many ahead. And I speak these words tonight providentially in the course of our exposition in the hopes that they will be a strength and an encouragement to you, that they will give you guidance, and they will begin to develop strong fibers of muscle in your heart to be prepared and to be equipped for what lies ahead. And I don't want what I'm about to say to be misunderstood, but in the region in which we live, this speaks and resonates. Not everybody's going to be able to work at Answers in Genesis. Not everybody's going to be

able to find their living at the Ark Encounter and there's a lot that I could say about that. But we're not all going to be able to retreat into a Christian environment and find our living. We're going to be out in the world, and that's where we should be. We should not be afraid to be out in the world, but there will be necessary conflict that comes as a result of that and we need to be prepared for it and we need to be prepared in a way that causes us to shine for Christ, that causes us to be strong and courageous, not to be angry and to play the victim, not to be fearful and trembling over what might happen in the future, but to be so persuaded and convinced about the truth of Christianity. to be so persuaded about the Lordship of Jesus Christ that we are prepared to suffer the loss of many things, including our reputation, including our jobs, including our families, if the case may come to that, to be persuaded to lose it all for the sake of the one who laid down it all on our behalf. And we just have to come to grips with these things. We're not going to be able to retreat into our own little subculture and have these things pass us by. It's not going to work that way, as some of you have already found to be true and are in the midst of the battle even now. I want you to know that I am on your side, that I stand here not at all to do anything other than to be a strength and a support through the teaching of God's word to you, so that the people that are associated with Truth Community Church, those that name the name of Christ, those that believe his word, would be distinguished in days and months and years to come, distinguished by their courage, distinguished by their confidence, distinguished by their strength in unjust suffering that comes from a hostile world and Jesus gave us these words to have precisely that effect upon us.

Let us remember as we approach these inspired words of Scripture, let us remember that our Lord himself suffered unjustly and died at the hands of sinners on a human level. It was what God appointed before the foundation of the world, yes, but it was an unjust suffering and he had done nothing to provoke the opposition that was against him. Let us remember the twelve apostles plus Paul who all were martyred in different ways for the sake of their faith, for the sake of testimony to Christ with one exception, and John the apostle was maltreated and cast out to the island of Patmos where he wrote so much literature at that point, including the book of Revelation. And then the ten waves of suffering in human history in the first three centuries, ten waves of persecution against Christians until Constantine put an end to it early in the fourth century. Beloved, the fountain of everything that we believe, the source of it all, just starting at the New Testament, not even going back to the Old Testament just yet, the fountain of everything that we believe that we hold dear, the truth has been handed down to us through the scarred, gnarled hands of those who have been persecuted, who have suffered for the faith that we hold dear. And it's just very, very, very important for us to keep that in mind because so many professing Christians have, you know, have been nursed on the thought of American liberty and justice and, you know, and I have my rights and all of that. and whatever people think about that politically, understand that that is not where our spiritual roots are. Our spiritual roots are not in protection by the government. Our spiritual roots are in persecution by the government. And until that's clear in our minds, we are going to wrongly devote our energies and misunderstand everything that is happening to us. Christ calls us to something different and to a different standard here and promises us something that is far better than having a protected political class in prosperous Western culture. That's all going away anyway, and so we might as well

embrace the change that's coming and say now in light of what's coming and is already here, what would our Lord say to us? And in the words of the hymn that we sang, he would have us to be hiding in him. He would have our souls to be still in the presence of Christ and looking to promises and blessings like this that we see in these three verses so that we would respond like Christian men, that we would respond like Christian women. You know, Scripture tells us to stand like men, to be strong. and not to be whiners and complainers and playing the victim card. That's not worthy of Christ. And so we need to see something different and to see what the standard and the call is and set our hearts on these things and let the world come and do to us what it may.

So let's look at these six questions, three tonight, three next week, and go from there and trust the Lord to greatly use this to strengthen us for the time that is at hand. And also, beloved, as this is just on my mind so much these days, to realize that as we do this and as we cultivate this kind of courage and confidence and willingness to suffer for the name of Christ, that as we do so, maybe, maybe the Lord would be pleased to take our testimony and pass it forward to generations yet to be born. Just as he did with the generation of the apostles, the generation of those blessed Christians in the first three centuries who suffered so greatly under the Roman emperors, and we're still talking about them 1800 years after the fact, maybe, just maybe, some of us would be privileged to live lives that reflect the confidence and the call of Christ as set forth in this passage, and maybe, just maybe, someone would be encouraged in the future yet to come by the example that we leave behind. Whether that's individually, to a child, a grandchild, a great grandchild, whether it's a corporate testimony, I don't know, but we're in a position of opportunity, and we need to see these things from that perspective and I'm grateful for the courage that many of you have shown and exemplified in your lives when things have been at stake and your livelihoods have been at stake, for example, and you've been faithful. May God bless you and bless us as we turn to his word.

Now, first question that I want to ask and answer here is this: will true Christians be persecuted? That's the first point for tonight. Every point is a question and a point for every answer, I guess. Will true Christians be persecuted? And the answer to that question is an unqualified yes. They will be. Jesus states the cost of discipleship upfront. At the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, he makes it plain and he doesn't hold anything back from us, and as we look at other Scriptures, we'll see how fully he laid this out for us to consider. He states the cost of discipleship upfront. Look at verse 10 with me. He says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Now, let me just remind you of things that we've pointed out in the past. This is the back book end, you might say, of the front book end of the first Beatitude. They both end with a similar statement, in fact, the identical statement. In Matthew 5:3, we read, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Then we read in verse 10, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake," here it is, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And those two ending clauses, "theirs is the kingdom of heaven," function like a lasso, you might say, that is thrown around all of the Beatitudes and ties them together into a single unit so that you are to view all of these together rather than separately. These Beatitudes are different aspects of the same person that Jesus is describing. There is not someone who is

genuinely poor in spirit, who is one category and then the other categories do not apply to him. They're all linked together like links of a golden chain describing the necklace that adorns the true believer and distinguishes him from the world around him. And so these Beatitudes are taken together to be describing in different measures that which is true of every believer, and we know that it's every believer because all of these Beatitudes are exclusive. Theirs and theirs alone is the kingdom of heaven. They and they alone shall be comforted. And we've talked about the exegetical reasons for that understanding. And so the Beatitudes are describing true disciples, truly repentant people, those who have truly been born again, and saying that these are different aspects of character that will come out of the life of everyone who is a true believer, coming out perhaps in different different measures, but it will all be identifiable in true Christians. And so when we see this statement about persecution, it's the same thing, it's this is true of every true believer to one degree or another.

Now, as I said, and if you look at verse 9, the prior Beatitude that says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God," what's there to dislike about a peacemaker? Why would a peacemaker provoke conflict? And even as you see that, and just kind of a reminder that I emphasized at pretty great length last week, the fact that peacemaking is not at the expense of truth and that there are many times where Scripture says that the true believers are not going to be able to associate with anyone and everyone at all times because there's too much warning about separating from angry people, immoral people in the church, divisive people within the church, there's too many things like that to tell us that that every Christian, or any Christian really, is going to be able to have perfectly peaceable relationships with everyone in their lives, come what may. That's not true and this statement by Christ shows us that it's not true, and so it just helps us to have right expectations about what is to come. In fact, I remember someone a tenderhearted Christian, but perhaps a bit superficial in thinking, that said—this was a long, long time ago—said that, you know, if Christians would just be more friendly and smile to everybody, then, you know, we could just get along with everybody. That's not true. That's a complete misunderstanding of the spiritual realities and the spiritual battles that are at stake. It is not biblical thinking. To the contrary, persecution according to Scripture is inevitable and I want to take you to three different passages that illuminate this for us.

Turn to the gospel of Luke 12. Luke 12, and in response to that well-intended, kindhearted, but misguided thinking by professing Christians, I would just encourage you that if you're a reader of the Bible, such things will not mislead you. If you just consistently read the Bible through cover to cover over the course of time, over the course of your life, you'll find things that make it easy to discern the error in the ways of such things that are said. So in Luke 12, beginning in verse 49, our Lord Jesus said, "I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!" And then he asks this rhetorical question, "Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law

against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law." Christ says the very inevitable result of my coming is going to be division, so much so that in the closest of relationships Christ comes and in the closest of relationships Christ can have a dividing wedging, if I can use that as a verb, a wedging effect on the closest of relationships. He says to expect that.

Look over at John 15. You can read a similar comment in Matthew 10, of course, which we've looked at many times over the course of the years. John 15:18 Jesus says, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but 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." Listen as I read 2 Timothy 3:12 where it says, "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." And in 1 John, in 1 John we read, let me turn there for a moment, Scripture warns us, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Chapter 3, verse 1, we read, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him." And on and on it goes in Scripture, these unqualified statements that believers will face resistance, hostility, opposition, persecution from the world around us, going even to the closest relationships that we have.

Beloved, blood itself is not thick enough to prevent division between an unbeliever and a believer within the same family, and I know that many of you know that by sad personal experience as I do. It's not because we're doing something wrong. It's not because we've been unkind or because we have spoken too freely and too boldly; very few of us are guilty of that. I know I'm not guilty of that. I wish I was. It's because there is spiritual conflict that is engendered in the unregenerate heart by the overflow of the Holy Spirit indwelling a true believer. Persecution is inevitable. Will true Christians be persecuted? Yes, absolutely. Scripture says all too many times for us to excuse ourselves from that reality and the great pastor Sinclair Ferguson, he has a little book on the Sermon on the Mount that's very helpful and I recommend it to you. I think it's simply titled "The Sermon on the Mount" by Sinclair Ferguson. He says this about this passage. He says, "Christians are persecuted for the sake of righteousness because of their loyalty to Christ." Now listen to this, beloved. This is very insightful on the part of the Scottish teacher. "Real loyalty to him creates friction in the hearts of those who pay him only lip service. Loyalty arouses their consciences and leaves them with only two alternatives, follow Christ or silence him. Often their only way of silencing Christ is by silencing his servants. Persecution in subtle or less subtle forms is the result."

So will true Christians be persecuted? Yes. It is inevitable. And the true Christian embraces that. Beloved, think about it this way. Let's just think about it in terms of our love and appreciation and gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's think about it like that, shall we? Our Christ purchased our salvation at the cost of his own blood. He still bears the scars in his hands and his feet. The thorns were thrust into the crown of his brow. The

sword was plunged into his side. He was mocked. He was spat upon. He was beaten. He was slapped. It's just unthinkable what sinners did when they had the Son of God in their hands. It's just unthinkable, you know, just on an ethical level that such a sinless, perfect one was treated in that way. But think about it this way, beloved, in light of the sufferings of Christ on our behalf, would we really refuse to receive any suffering? Would we rule out of hand any suffering, any persecution for the sake of Christ in light of that? Would we take the cross of Christ and refuse it for ourselves and say, "I only want the crown, I don't want the cross. I only want the peace, I don't want the trouble that comes along with being a follower of Christ." Would you really want that? Isn't there something in your heart, even if it's with fear and trembling, that says, "No, I love Christ enough that not only am I willing to suffer for him, I embrace the idea of suffering for him. If I can be that much closer in my identification with Christ, then I want that," the true believer says. "I welcome that because I love him and I realize that he suffered for me and therefore it's not too much for me to suffer a little bit in response." Those of you that have been beside the bedside of a suffering loved one, haven't you felt the feeling of, "I wish I could take the suffering on their behalf"? You want to relieve them of the suffering. Well, we can't relieve Christ of his suffering, nor would he want us to, but we can share in it and out of love for him, gratitude, wanting to know him more fully, we would accept that and even embrace it.

Second question for tonight: when will persecution come? When will persecution come? Go back to Matthew 5 with me again. Matthew 5. You see, the reality of it is it's actually a privilege to suffer for Christ. It's a blessing. That's what Jesus is saying, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake." They have received divine favor to be in that position of having been persecuted. That's something else not related directly to this second point. Our second point, our second question for tonight is when will persecution come, and the answer to that question is this: there's no way to know. There's no way to know. Look at verses 10 and 11, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," and he goes on to say in verse 11, "Blessed are you when," that's the key word here for this question, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account."

Now, let me just point out some grammatical things here as we look at this text expositionally. The phrase there, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake," are persecuted, in the original language that's what's called the perfect tense and what the perfect tense does is it expresses an action that was completed in the past but has ongoing effects to the present time, and here Jesus is expressing the reality of past persecution that lingers in its effects to the present. And that's really important to understand. Jesus here is not saying, he is not saying at all that only those people who immediately, presently are undergoing ongoing persecution, only those people are Christians. That's not what he's saying. That's not what this construction means at all. What Jesus is saying here does not mean that you must be suffering immediate persecution today in order to know for sure that you're a Christian. That's not the case, and you can see that, first of all, just by that verb tense, that it refers to past persecution with lingering effects that means it's over but there's still some effects left over. So for

example, perhaps some of you have had family members that have broken off a relationship with you and they don't want to talk to you, they won't talk to you, they don't see you or anything like that, and it's something that happened in the past. It's not an ongoing argument, an ongoing conflict, but there is a state of a broken relationship based on something that happened in the past. That's an example of the perfect tense and how it would apply. They broke off relationship in the past, you have the effect of not being able to talk with them now, that's an idea of the perfect tense.

Now, when you look at what Jesus says in verse 11, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you," that phrase in the original language, it has an indefinite sense to it. It prepares you for an event without telling you when it will occur or how it will occur in your particular circumstances. It would be like saying, know that this is true whenever it comes your way. When someone slanders you, when someone rejects you, when someone fires you as a result of that, it doesn't give us any idea of when these things are going to happen, it simply says whenever it happens, know that this is true. And so what Jesus is describing here, in the first instance, he's describing those who have been persecuted in the past, and who feel the effects of it today even if they're not presently suffering persecution, and in what he says, he leaves the door open for future troubles. When this comes, when this happens, when people speak ill of you, know that these things are true, but it doesn't require immediate, present, always and forever persecution in a person's life in order to validate that person's faith. Persecution will happen, but that doesn't mean that it has to be happening right now in order for you to be assured and confident of your salvation.

And so we can draw some conclusions from that, beloved. Persecution, suffering for the name of Christ, will not necessarily be the unbroken pattern of life for all believers everywhere under all circumstances. It's not like that and collectively our own experiences would vindicate that. Aren't there seasons in your Christian life where you've walked through peaceful times and you've been able to enjoy a sense of serenity and tranquility in your relationships and you know something about the peace and calm that the Spirit brings and blesses you with? And then something happens, something changes, a new relationship comes in, disrupts it, and then you're having difficulties. You know, we know something of the ebb and flow of these things. Just as in nature the tide comes in and the tide goes out, so it is with Christians. At times persecution comes in and sometimes it recedes. And so you may not be suffering for Christ right now, but that does not mean that you need to worry about your lack of spirituality. That's not Jesus' point. Think about it this way. Jesus is looking at this consideration from a big picture, total life perspective, rather than what's happening today or this week. Over the course of a lifetime of walking with Christ, when will persecution come? We don't know, but it will come. Persecution is inevitable. It is the fabric of Christian life. It may be brief and mild. It may be prolonged and painful. But here's the point that we need to see and contemplate with each other tonight, beloved, is this, someone who refuses opposition for the sake of Christ, that's the kind of person who says, "I'm not willing to go there." Someone who will gladly compromise in order to avoid a conflict, to avoid a consequence of serving Christ, someone who gladly compromises, someone who is resolute, "I'm not going to speak up because I don't want the trouble," you see, a person like that is the kind of

person that needs to step back and say, "Well, wait a minute, what is this? What's going on in my heart and in my life that I would have that kind of attitude? How would I be a follower of Christ if I'm unwilling to engage and to receive any kind of difficulty?" The broader point here for this question and answer is we don't know when it will come but we know that in one form or another it will come, and so when will persecution come? There's no way to know. We just know that when it comes, here's what to expect.

Now let me ask and answer a third question here this evening: how does persecution come to us? How does persecution come to us? The answer to that question is it comes in many forms and some are more painful than others. It comes in many forms and some are more painful than others, and I think that this aspect of what Jesus says is very, very encouraging for us to contemplate. Look at verse 11 with me where Jesus says, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Now, a couple of things are going on there in verse 11. First of all, Jesus is expanding on his theme from verse 10, and he is applying it personally to those who are hearing him. He states it as a universal principle in the third person in verse 10 when he says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake," you know, third person, they, this is what happens to them. But now in verse 11 he comes and he speaks to us directly and personally and he uses the second person, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account." Four times there he uses the pronoun "you" in that single verse. And so Christ now through his word, Christ in the immense consolation brought to us by the Holy Spirit is bringing us direct comfort and speaking to us and giving us that which we can lay hold of when we begin to suffer for Christ whenever that comes. He shifts to the second person as he elaborates on it.

Now beloved, in light of what I said about the early Christians, it would be easy to think about persecution only in the bloodiest and most difficult and severe types of opposition that Christians receive, the martyrdom of the apostles, the ten waves of persecution, the burning at the stake of genuine believers during the reign of Bloody Mary in England, and persecution certainly has gone to bloody extremes throughout church history. Yes, yes, yes, by all means. Look at the book of Hebrews 11 with me. Hebrews 11 and the contrast in this great hall of faith is really remarkable. Let's start in verse 32 and just see the contrast of the outward success, the outward blessing that some saints received and the outward sufferings that others received. Verse 32, Hebrews 11, "what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets--who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection." All these lofty, mighty, miraculous triumphs and victories and yet that's not what was in faith for everyone. The writer goes on and states by stunning contrast, "Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and

goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated--of whom the world was not worthy--wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." This is a pretty, you know, you get both extremes there in that passage, don't you? And you see the great physical suffering and the deprivation that these heroes of the faith went through. And if that's all that we had to think about with persecution, it would be really intimidating. It would be intimidating in a couple of different ways. One, it would be intimidating if that's all that persecution meant; it would be intimidating and fearful to think that that would necessarily be the mark of a true Christian, that we would go through that level of suffering.

That would be intimidating on its own, and it would be intimidating realizing that, you know, for almost everyone in here, I won't presume to make a universal statement, but for most of us, what's true elsewhere and stated elsewhere in Scripture is true of us, we haven't resisted to the point of blood in our testimony for Christ, have we? Maybe a few of you have, but generally speaking, we haven't resisted to the point of blood and yet, here in Hebrews, we see this bloodshed, church history speaks about bloodshed, and the pastor in the pulpit always speaks about that in terms of bloodshed, and you start to think about it in these extreme forms. But notice as we go back to Matthew 5, I find this very, very encouraging and helpful and the fullness of the balance that it gives to us in our thinking about it is just remarkable. When Jesus speaks about persecution for the sake of righteousness here in verses 10 and 11, he's not talking about those violent physical encounters. It's much milder. It's much less severe here in verse 11. Look at what he says. "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad," he says. Notice what this teaches us about what Jesus has in mind when he speaks about persecution. It's not always the violence. Sometimes persecution is simply the reality of verbal harassment against you, like audible complaints and challenges to your face or false accusations behind your back or on social media or whatever the case may be. Beloved, understand a couple of things here. Jesus here is talking about, he's emphasizing verbal suffering that doesn't have any physical component to it at all, and notice this also, that he's presupposing the fact that they're telling lies, that they are not speaking the truth. It wouldn't be persecution if they spoke the truth and so Jesus says, "Yeah, people will lie about you. People will lie about you to misrepresent you and to undermine you for the sake of being a follower and a disciple of mine." Jesus says, "Be glad and rejoice when that happens."

And so what we see here is this, is that there's a broad range, as I said earlier, persecution comes in many forms. It may be merely verbal. It may be unfair treatment. It may be physical abuse. It may be the silent treatment from an unbelieving spouse. It may be the loss of your job. It may be imprisonment, certainly our brothers and sisters in the lands of Russia and China know about that historically. It may be death. Notice the broad sweep of things that we see from Scripture and from the course of church history. It may be the worker passed over for a promotion because of his biblical ethics. It may be the Christian student on a secular campus being penalized for speaking biblical truth and having the social media mob engaged against them. It may be the woman who is rejected because she rebukes gossip rather than drinking it in. Often, it's a Christian rejected by people that

he loves for the sake of his testimony for Christ and you see someone walk out the door figuratively or literally slamming the door behind them, saying, "This relationship's over. I don't want you speaking that way to me. I don't want to hear it. I don't want you speaking that way to my children." You reach out, "Can we at least be friends on a superficial level?" No, we can't. Write to them years later, "Can we address it now? Can we at least talk?" No. No. Some of you know that, don't you, by direct personal experience. And the reality of your regenerate heart is shown by the fact that you grieve over that, that it brings sorrow to you, that you don't want it to be that way. You would have a human relationship with them but they won't have it, or they put conditions on it and say, "You must not speak about Christ to me." I can't accept that condition, I'm sorry. "You must accept me as transgender and address me by my chosen name and by my chosen pronouns, or you're bringing division into our relationship." Well, no, actually you're the one who's injecting the division. You're the one who moved, not me. You're the one who's placing down unacceptable conditions. "Then I don't want any part of you." Okay, that's your choice. I won't hold it against you. The door is always open. My arms are open for a return. But if you're trying to silence my testimony to Christ, if the price of our relationship is that you demand that I betray Christ in word or conduct or deed or thought or affirmation of things that I know that he condemns, then we can't have a relationship. But that's on you, not on me. I'll be loyal to Christ, and if you choose to reject me on account of that, I can't help that. I can't change. I won't change because my preeminent loyalty is to Christ alone.

And look, you know, corporately together in our fellowship, we know what that's like to say that to a parent, say that to a child, say that to a sibling, say that to a friend. We know what that's like. Together, we share enough experiences in a room of this size. We know what that's like and, beloved, what we must find our rest and our hope and our comfort in is that that's pleasing to Christ when we do that. The fact that men reject us is not an indication that Christ condemns or rebukes us. Christ is the one who said in Luke 12, "I came to bring that kind of division." And beloved, now more than ever, in the watered-down nature of the so-called evangelical church, now more than ever, God is calling Christians to live with that kind of integrity, that kind of a commitment, and that kind of courage that stands out in our postmodern culture, that says, "No, there is truth. There is someone who commands my loyalty to a point that I'm willing to lose a human relationship over it if that is what it takes." The collective danger among professing Christians these days is not that we're being too strong for Christ and driving people away, the collective danger is that we're so quick to compromise that the reality of the differences is silenced and marginalized. Let's you and me be different. Let's you and me be different. Let's love Christ more than men. Let's accept rejection for his sake, if that's what it requires, never provoking it, never seeking it, but if it's inflicted upon us, to stand our ground. Rather than walking away from Christ, let men walk away from us, knowing where our ground is, standing our ground, and trusting Christ for the consequences of it.

And so, when Jesus speaks here in verses 10 and 11, this is what I really want you to take away from this point, beloved, it is the fact of persecution that Jesus blesses, not the form of it. Here in the Beatitudes, Jesus doesn't speak about imprisonment and martyrdom as if the blessing is restricted to those who undergo that most severe form. He lists mere verbal

abuse, "When people speak evil of you on my account, your reward is great," he says, and here's what I want you to see about that, the Christ who suffered like he did looks upon his disciples and says, "I will bless you for even when people speak against you," just verbally without any other consequence to us. Here's what I want you to see about Christ in this, how gracious that is, how accommodating, how generous of him who suffered the ultimate penalty on our behalf for him to say, "You know, when people misrepresent you and lie against you and say you're a bad person because of me, I'm going to give you a great reward in heaven as a result of that." But Lord, but Lord, this is nothing compared to what you went through. It's nothing compared to the apostles. It's nothing compared to those early Christians. It's nothing like being thrown in prison. Why are you being so generous in your promise on this little account? How gracious he is, how loving and compassionate he is, and how much he knows and sympathizes with the fact that these things weigh on us and hurt us and tend to discourage us, and so he comes and he gives us these great promises of his faithfulness to bless us in heaven. You go through Scripture, you see who Christ is, you see what he does, you see his promises, and you're just driven again and again back to the simplicity of saying he is so worthy of our love, so worthy of our obedience, so worthy of our devotion. He's so kind. He's so good. He's so wonderful even to the point of promising us an equal reward with what the prophets receive when we don't suffer a fraction of what they did. I love him, don't you? To know someone like that in the universe, and that he runs the universe, that he made the universe, that the Creator, Redeemer is like that? You know, your heart just pumps out gratitude and loyalty and devotion when these things come to bear on your heart.

And so, beloved, wrapping up things for tonight and leaving other things for next week, here's the thing, you're a Christian, you're a true Christian, beloved, you will pay a price to follow Christ. You will. And what the true believer says is something like this in response, knowing that Christ is the one who delivered you from sin and Satan, from judgment and hell, knowing that Christ is the one who has given you a new mind, a new nature, joy in this life and the promise of eternal life and eternal joy to come, knowing those things and being told you'll pay a price to follow him, there will be times where it stings, where it hurts, where it costs to truly follow him, in my judgment, the true believer has something like this that he says inside his heart in response where he says, "No cost is too great as I follow Christ. I refuse to be the hypocrite who wants the crown but not the cross." The true believer, my friend, says, "I won't hold the nail-pierced hands of Jesus with hands that refused the pain of persecution. I don't want to hold his nail-scarred hands with hands that are utterly and completely unscarred by the pain of persecution myself."

And so, beloved, have you suffered for Christ? I know some of you have. You've told me. You've told me about spouses that have walked away or refuse you and children that have refused you, and I know that I'm speaking tonight in this room to peoples whose hearts have really been hurt on account of your love and loyalty to Christ. I know that and in this text, Christ himself speaks words of comfort to you. He says that that hurt is a blessing from God. You have the blessing of sharing in the sorrows and the sufferings of Christ. The world rejected him, the world rejects you, welcome to the fellowship of his sufferings. Jesus Christ, your Lord, he cares. He won't forget. He sees it all. He knows the numbers of hairs on your head. He knows the thoughts of your heart. He sympathizes

with you in your suffering and he will bless you in the end, and I invite you back next week to see just what that reward is.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Gracious Lord, we're reminded of the words in Hebrews 4 about you. It says, "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession." And Christ, as we think of this word in Hebrews 4, we thank you for the reality that it expresses, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." And so, gracious Lord, merciful Christ, loving Savior, fairest Lord Jesus, in light of who you are and what you have done and what you have promised, we come at the close of this evening with confidence and draw near to the throne of grace. I pray that you would look on those who are suffering even this evening at the hands of those who have rejected them, hurt them, reviled them, misrepresented them, threatened them, Father, look on them with grace and extend the promised mercy to help them in this time of need, and while the pain of earth may be great, may the promise of heaven and reward for fidelity to Christ be something that transcends the earthly sorrow, the earthly loss, with a great sense of comfort and a great sense of intimacy with Christ, and that this might be an occasion where an overflowing assurance of salvation, an overflowing greater awareness of the love of God on that particular individual heart might be greater than anything that they have known before this date as you, by your Spirit, attend to your word with hope and comfort and mercy applied to that suffering heart so that there would be no doubt of your love for them, no doubt that they are in your family, no doubt that you have adopted and redeemed and justified them, and no doubt, Father, that you will one day glorify them, that every tear of this life will be wiped away, every sorrow quickly forgotten. And Father, may you bring each one under the sound of my voice safely into your heavenly kingdom perhaps having felt the flames, the heat of persecution, yet ultimately, Father, walking through unsinged because of your great faithfulness to your own. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thanks for listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. You can find more church information, Don's complete sermon library and other helpful materials at thetruthpulpit.com teaching God's people God's word. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.