

November 21, 2021
The National Presbyterian Church
The Beatitudes: "Blessed by Trouble"
Matthew 5:10-16; 2 Corinthians 11:21-23; Hebrew 11,12
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Perhaps the most-counter-intuitive beatitude of all!

- *Happy are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. . . . for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*
- *Happy are you when people revile and abuse you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad. . . [not just feel "blessed"; but → Be Happy! Joyful!]*
- Rejoice and BE GLAD! *For your reward is great in Heaven . . .*
- *for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

1. The prophets Elijah, Jeremiah (29:5-7); Daniel

2. Apostle Paul, describes his persecuted life in 2 Cor.11

3. Tacitus, a Roman (1st century)

No human effort, no princely largess nor offerings to the gods could make that infamous rumor disappear [that Nero had somehow ordered the fire]. Therefore to abolish that rumor, Nero falsely accused and executed those people called Christians who were infamous for their abominations. The originator of the name, Christ, was executed as a criminal by the Procurator Pontius Pilot during the reign of Tiberius [this reference to Pontius Pilate matches exactly what we have in the pages of our gospels]. They seized those who admitted their faith . . . And as they perished, they were made into sports. They were killed by dogs by having the hides of beasts attached to them or they were nailed to crosses or they were set aflame and when the daylight passed away they were used as night time lamps."

4. Today: **Open Doors**, January 2021, "Watch List" on persecution, reported in The Guardian

Persecution of Christians around the world has increased during the Covid pandemic, with **More than 340 million Christians – One in Eight – facing high levels of persecution and discrimination because of their faith**

- More than 9 out of 10 of the global total of 4,761 deaths -- in Africa,
- mostly in Nigeria, -- where 3800 Christians died.

So Jesus says: *Be my follower & trouble can be expected*

But also: *Be my follower – and I'll provide you the resources to bear it –*

3 resources to maintain our happiness

I. The Security of our Status -- Holding the Right Title . .

- Those who pass through trouble for his sake are *already* "Citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven."
- "Yours IS the Kingdom of Heaven" Not *will* be; Nor *might* be; but IS!!

II. Great Comfort in Company/Companionship – On the Right Team

Far from being a sign of God's displeasure -- when life is hard for us as we follow Jesus . . . we need to think of it as **a sign from God** :-- that we are **part of the right team . . . part of the right family**

Hebrew 11 & 12

- Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,
- Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners,
- *so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.*

III. The Certain Fact of our Future in Heaven – Connectd to the Lord of Time

Happy . . . Rejoice and be glad. For your reward is great in Heaven

- A **future** – where pain and suffering & trouble and difficulty = over.
- i. This certainty about the future, was a critical part of Jesus' teaching & source of power for those early Christians** who faced persecution to the point of death
- If Jesus suffered and rose to life with God in heaven
 - Then, they believed, SO TOO WILL WE

ii. The "certainty of the future" is essential for the beatitudes to be true:

6 of the other 7 Beatitudes depend upon the Certain Fact of our Future

- ⁴"Happy are those who mourn, for they *will* be comforted.
When? Maybe in this life – but certainly in the next
- ⁵"Happy are the meek, for they *will* inherit the earth.
- ⁶"Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they *will* be filled.
- ⁷"Happy are the merciful, for they *will* receive mercy.
- ⁸"Happy are the pure in heart, for they *will* see God.
- ⁹"Happy are the peacemakers, for they *will* be called children of God.
- ***Happy . . . are you when you are persecuted, or reviled, or treated or spoken of badly – for my sake: for there's an end in sight & a reward ahead that we can bank on: the certain fact of our future – in heaven.***