

MESSAGE OUTLINE

Blessed - Persecuted

Matthew 5:1–12 (NIV)

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ²and he began to teach them.

He said:

³"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

⁵Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

⁷Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

⁸Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

⁹Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰**Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

¹¹**Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."**

NOTES:

1. The irony of the blessed being persecuted.

Blessed are those who are persecuted

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled. *Matthew 5:6 (NIV)*

- Desiring good
- Becoming good
- Doing good

2. Because of their righteousness.

because of righteousness,

You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. *Matthew 10:22 (NIV)*

In the last 30 years, the number of countries where Christians suffer high and extreme levels of persecution has almost doubled to 76 countries. Today, more than 360m Christians suffer high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith... 5,621 Christians were killed for their faith last year. 90% of these were from Nigeria alone. The huge increase in violence in Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa has caused more Christians to lose their lives in the last 5 years. Christians killed in 2023 numbered 80% more than five years ago (3,066). Source: *World Watch List, Open Doors Ministry*

3. The promised joy on both sides of heaven.

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed... For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. *2 Corinthians 4:8–9,17 (NIV)*

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. *James 1:2–4 (NIV)*

- Empathy
- Comfort
- Prayer

"Discipleship does have its costs - anyone who has dared to bring the gospel to bear on his or her own life knows that. Whether we feel it or not may be a good litmus test for discerning if we are truly following on his path, or pursuing a false trail" *Jeanne DeCelles*

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

March 5, 2023

As needed, refer to the Order of Worship and Resources at solanabeach.church for sermon video, message outline, and small group questions print version.

CONNECT WITH GOD (Select one of the below practices to begin your small group time this week or select a practice from a previous week.)

Breath Prayer: This is an ancient practice that invites us to slow down from and awaken ourselves—even our breath—to the presence of God. It is an invitation to remember that God is closer to us than even our own breath! *This week you are invited to use the phrase: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” As you focus on breathing in and out, allow the words to flow out from inward breath to outward breath.*

- **Inhale:** “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God.”
- **Exhale:** “Have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Continue on for a few minutes at a slowed pace, making space for a growing awareness of God’s Holy Spirit.

Use the Lenten Card for Reflection

Alone: Using the Lenten card passed out on Sunday, February 19th, spend 10 minutes engaging with the suggested practice of *confessing, remembering, and returning.*

CONNECT WITH EACH OTHER

- *Together:* Read **Matthew 5:1-12** (focusing in on verse 10-12), and **Matthew 10:22, 2 Corinthians 4:8-9,17** and **James 1:2-4**
- After you have read, reflect as a whole group on the two passages. Consider the following questions:
 - What stories, images, or experiences come to mind as when you consider the phrase: “blessed are those who are persecuted”?
 - How would you define or describe persecution?

CONNECT WITH SCRIPTURE (Read the passages and review the sermon outline. Then select the best questions or customize the questions for your group.)

- Read the main points from the sermon outline.
- What questions, observations, or reactions do you have after reflecting on the passage and sermon?
- What could it mean to be persecuted for righteousness (v. 10)?

- In verse 11, Jesus describes different ways that you may be treated because of him. In what ways do you relate to this in your own context? Or do you relate to it at all?
- What’s so ‘upside-down’ about this blessing?
- Which supporting passage from Sunday’s message challenges you the most?
- What’s the promise of Jesus to those who are suffering because of him (v. 12)?
- How is Jesus shaping a new vision of community in God’s kingdom through verses 10-12?

CONNECT WITH GOD’S MISSION IN THE WORLD

- How does our—generally—comfortable and wealthy lifestyle in the United States disconnect us from the reality of persecution in the world?
- How can you pray for, engage with, and love those who are persecuted for the sake of Christ in the world?

PRAYER

In pairs, spend time entering into a time of confession, remembering, and returning. Consider how you might be called to take greater risks for Jesus or how you might step out of your own comfort zone to step into less ‘safe’ or ‘familiar’ places in your own community in order to be a witness to the good news of Jesus. Pray for the persecuted church around the world. Commit together to turn towards those deeply suffering persecution for their faith and pray for them often.

“You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God’s kingdom. Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even—for though they don’t like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.
(The Message)

NOTES: