

RADICAL PERSPECTIVE
Isaiah 61:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12

(Read Matthew 5:1-12)

Intro: For a month now we've been looking at the persecuted Church and hopefully learning from it. We are learning from them not because they're perfect, because they are not. We aren't learning from them because they have all the answers, because they don't. They probably aren't even better Christians than us. But what they have been is steadfast and faithful in the face of incredible adversity. Also their witness to the ones who persecute them as well as to the nonbelievers who observe their faith is evidence they stand on God's promises and not on their own strength. Because of all this we have much to learn from them.

We have talked about radical faith, radical joy, radical hope, radical love, and today we're going to look at the all-encompassing idea of the radical perspective of the persecuted church. This is because one's entire attitude needs to be tuned to the high calling of Christ in order to survive and thrive in the face of adversity.

With that in mind we are going to look a little bit at the passage that was read earlier by Martha from Isaiah and then we're going to spend the remainder of the talk going from Beatitude to Beatitude from the opening of the Sermon on the Mount which I just read to you from Matthew 5.

You see, these aren't just nice sayings of Jesus. They are a picture of the radical perspective that Jesus lived out even as he spoke about them. He spoke about them because they are what he expects of his followers.

This is important because as we are frustrated and even worry about faltering when a mere hiccup threatens our religious freedom we can look to learn from the radical perspective of the persecuted Church as they live out their walk with Christ in the midst of hostility.

Once again, as I begin my talk, I will read to you the text of the devotional that was the inspiration of this series Learning from the Persecuted Church:

Radical Perspective

All of us live our lives from a particular perspective. This perspective is shaped by many factors, including our experiences, our education, and our upbringing. Hopefully, all of these things that shape our perspective on life are also shaped by our spiritual life. This includes our relationship with God, and is reinforced by the scriptures in a significant way. We can also add to our perspective through the observation of the Persecuted Church.

We have discussed the radical faith, joy, hope, and love that the Persecuted Church demonstrates as they serve the Lord through difficulties and suffering. Finally, we will focus on their radical perspective. This perspective is an eternal one, and when we see our lives through the lens of eternity, our lives change dramatically and for the better.

The Beatitudes offer an incredible window into what life is like when one has an eternal perspective. We are prone to see the things of everyday life, as if this life is all there is, and ever will be. The Bible teaches just the opposite. It shows us that our lives are "like a vapor that appears for a moment, then vanishes away." Since we will live on in eternity as well, we should see this life and all that it contains for what it is: the beginning notes to the prelude of forever.

The Beatitudes give us an eternal perspective on humility, mourning, gentleness, righteousness, mercy, purity, and peacemaking. They also give us a true understanding of Christian persecution. Every statement of the Beatitudes begins with "Blessed are...". This text shows us how we are actually blessed when we are reviled, persecuted, and slandered for the sake of Christ. This will seem to be absurd, unless we understand life in light of eternity. The truth is seen in the scripture, but the life and witness of the Persecuted Church testifies of the experiential reality of this lofty spiritual concept. When we learn to have this radical perspective of seeing life in the light of eternity, radical faith, joy, hope, and love will fill our lives.

Let us walk in Spirit and in truth with all we have learned from the radical faith, joy, hope, love, and perspective of the Persecuted Church.

From the 5 day YouVersion app devotional LEARNING FROM THE PERSECUTED CHURCH by the International Leadership Institute (<https://ILITeam.org>)

One thing we have seen all through this study and it is solidified by our texts today is . . .

The best is yet to come

- Isaiah 61 is not only the scripture that Jesus used as he began his ministry as recorded by Luke in Luke 4:16-21, but it's also a ministry of proclaiming to beaten down humanity that deliverance was sure and that it was on its way. It was proclaiming a Year of Jubilee where all was restored to what it was designed for. This the hope the persecuted church rightly hangs on.
- Regarding Isaiah 61:1-3, F. B. Meyer says "*At Nazareth our Lord applied these words to himself. Let us care for the outcasts as he did; but to do so we need to be anointed by the Holy Spirit.*" He goes on to say that God not only delivers the captive but anoints with the oil of joy and with a crown instead of the ashes of mourning. Indeed one of the things that drives the radical perspective of the persecuted church is the fact that the best is yet to come.
- Now, on to

The blessedness of the people of God

- Barclay utilizes the terminology we've been using now for five Sundays when he writes, "*The Sermon on the Mount presents a radically different agenda than what the nation of Israel expected from the Messiah. It does not present the political or material blessings of the Messiah's reign. Instead, it expresses the spiritual implications of the rule of Jesus in our lives. This great message tells us how we will live when Jesus is our Lord.*" Jesus didn't expect us to be people who just happen to follow Jesus – he expects to radically reflect his perspective.
- The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus's "signature sermon" – in other words, this wasn't his best message or his epitome, it was what constituted all his preaching. This was Jesus's message and it boils down to Jesus declaring what His Kingdom is all about.
- The Beatitudes, which I read as I began this talk, are the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount. They are the intro and they are, in Barclay's words, the character of kingdom citizens. In other words, a radical perspective must be EVERY Christ Follower's perspective.
- Every one of the 9 Beatitudes begin with "Blessed is", which more accurately translated would be. "O the blessedness of . . .". The point being, this is the aspiration of every Christ Follower.
- The blessedness of the Poor in Spirit is first for a reason. It's the starting point. We need to recognize that the poor in spirit know that they have no spiritual asset without what God provides. In other words, without Jesus they are spiritually bankrupt because everyone comes to God with empty hands. As we come to him in our emptiness he fills us so we can receive the Kingdom of Heaven. There we go again, radical perspective knows that the best is yet to come.
- The blessedness of those who mourn. Our Isaiah passage pointed out that the Lord had anointed the Messiah to bring Good tidings to the afflicted and to comfort those who mourn. Barclay points out that this is the strongest word for "mourning" in the Greek and thus it is deep and passionate. So it's significant that these are those who mourn over sin and its effects with a deep sorrow and remorse. This is what being poor in spirit is.
- The blessedness of the meek. In a world where power goes to the strong, there is the contrast, that in the Kingdom, the Earth belongs to the humble and to those who put their confidence in God. We've often heard the truth that meekness is strength under control. There is so much you could do, but, as we learned last week, we love instead. Barclay says Christians like this are meek before God, in that they submit to His will and conform to His Word and they are meek before men, in that they are strong – yet also humble, gentle, patient, and longsuffering. In this world, and especially in this culture these days, meekness is radical perspective.
- The blessedness of those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Many in the persecuted church experience physical hunger in a way we never have, but more than anything, and what keeps them strong is their hunger for the word of God and his righteousness. When hunger and thirst for righteousness in the end you will be righteous. Spurgeon wrote, "*He hungers and thirsts after righteousness. He does not hunger and thirst that his own political party may get into power, but he does hunger and thirst that righteousness may be done in the land. He does not hunger and thirst that his own opinions may come to*

the front, and that his own sect or denomination may increase in numbers and influence, but he does desire that righteousness may come to the fore.” Hunger and thirst for righteousness. This is radical perspective.

- The blessedness of the merciful. One commentator asked, *“How can one who does not pardon, who does not exercise mercy toward his neighbor, anticipate the pardon of God?”* The promise is simple, the merciful will receive mercy. The persecuted church knows that their mercy now will eventually bring mercy for them. It’s not their motivation, but it is their promise. This is radical perspective. Looking back at Dirk Willems last week who turned around a rescued his pursuer from the ice and as a result died for his merciful and loving act we see a radical perspective that is driven by love and anticipation that the best is yet to come.
- The blessedness of the pure in heart. This is essentially integrity or honesty of heart and sincerity of intentions and attitudes, truth, and transparency. The people of God are the real deal. What you see is what you get and what you get is someone who reflects their Savior. Barclay makes it clear, *“In the ancient Greek, the phrase pure of heart has the idea of straightness, honesty, and clarity. There can be two ideas connected to this. One is of inner moral purity as opposed to the image of purity or ceremonial purity. The other idea is of a single, undivided heart – those who are utterly sincere and not divided in their devotion and commitment to God.”* Paul admonished the Philippians to . . . *let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, Philippians 1:27a.* And Peter wrote *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.* 1 Peter 2:12 (NIV). Living out a radical perspective exhibits the transformation God does in the hearts of those who turn their lives over to him, In other words, a pure heart is a witness. This is REALLY something we can learn from the persecuted church.
- The blessedness of the peacemakers. This one is particularly characteristic of the persecuted church. Barclay says, *“This does not describe those who live in peace, but those who actually bring about peace, overcoming evil with good. One way we accomplish this is through spreading the gospel, because God has entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18). In evangelism we make peace between man and the God whom they have rejected and offended.”* Let me just add that we often bring peace between man and man. Spurgeon points out though, that being a peacemaker doesn’t just happen – being pure in heart is a prerequisite for peacemaking. F. B. Meyer points out that the longing for peace is so profoundly anchored in the heart of humanity that it has always looked forward to a world where peace would reign among men. The Messiah is the prince of peace. A humanity reconciled with God will know peace. He is our peace (Ephesians 2:13-14) In other words, a radical perspective is required to being a son or daughter of God because that is what is needed to be peacemakers.
- The next two show how the rubber of the radical perspective of the persecuted church really hits the road as they specifically address persecution.
- The blessedness of those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. One commentator wrote, *“The righteousness of God is to be seen in His faithfulness to His covenant with His people. The righteousness of the child of God is seen in his fidelity to God, in his obedience even unto death, in his willingness to do battle with unrighteousness and all of its forms. And as he does this he exposes himself to not only misunderstanding and misrepresentation but also persecution from his fellow man.”* The world doesn’t like people who are striving to good. But then, we’ve not been promised anything else. All through history the people of God have suffered for being faithful. But there is a promise – we inherit the kingdom of God. Peter wrote, *Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.* 1 Peter 4:16. There it is again, the best is yet to come! So glorify God and stand on the promises. And finally . . .
- The blessedness of those who are reviled and persecuted and have evil and false accusations leveled at them for being Christ Followers. Blessed is the one who is persecuted because of his faithfulness to God an accused unjustly of love for him. If we haven’t already, one thing we should learn from the persecuted church is that persecution is seen as a normal consequence of discipleship to Jesus. But these people are only undergoing what their forebears have gone through. And it’s the same for us – nothing we can face is new. All through holy history the people of God have had false and libelous and scandalous accusations

leveled at them. So instead of whining, Jesus tells us to *Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.* Matthew 5:12

Conclusion: What more can I say about a radical perspective that those final words from Jesus? F. B. Meyer rightly said about these Beatitudes, “These dispositions do not purchase blessedness, but to cultivate them is to be blessed. We must expect to be persecuted if we hold up the pure light of a consistent life amid the evils of the world.” The persecuted Church already knows this, we need to look to them to lead us as we learn from them. The heading of the Beatitudes section of Matthew 5 in my NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY is "CHARACTERISTICS OF DISCIPLESHIP" So true discipleship is to have a radical perspective. Let's immerse ourselves in that. Amen.