**PURSUE (The Beatitudes) – Wk 7 – Persecution**

**It was a life of oppression, manipulation, unreliable politicians, and racial hatred passed down from generations. With this Jesus walks up a hill near the Sea of Galilee to share a kingdom perspective.**

**We are wrapping up Jesus’ Beatitudes = (Latin beatus) Blessings.**

**They describe a truly God blessed life. A deep state of bliss and calm.**

**Matthew 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. 5 Blessed are the (meek), for they will inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.**

**Today a helicopter view of all of them and the last one…**

**5:10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (He then clarifies the same blessing) 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.**

**Jesus makes an incredible claim of deity. Comparing persecution of OT prophets for their faithfulness to God – those persecuted for your faithfulness to Him – He is God.**

**Notice the blessing is the same as the first – connected to each other.**

**\*\*The first describes the condition of becoming a citizen of heaven**

**Matthew 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**\*\*The last describes the character of one who is a citizen of heaven**

**Matthew 5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**Reality is - loyalty to and allegiance to the truth of Jesus and**

**a commitment to live out the heart and character of God will result in opposition and even persecution.**

**The progressive nature of the beatitudes: They build upon each other**

**Starts - Poor in spirit – realizing your need for God = Salvation in Jesus**

**Leads to - Mourning – recognition of our sinful condition**

**Leads to - Meekness – a life surrenders to Jesus**

**Leads to - Hunger & Thirst – pursuing and desire to know Jesus more**

**Results in - Merciful – a compassion for others**

**Result in - Pure in heart – a desire to live pure in my life**

**Results in - Peacemaker – seeks to bring the gospel of peace to other**

**And a life like this will lead to – Persecution**

**But this is not that persecution is a blessing – but persecution for righteousness sake – meaning living to honor God for Christ’s sake.**

**Those who faithfully live the first 7 are guaranteed at some point - to experience the eighth. Blessed - but w/ a price.**

**1 Peter 4:12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. (at his return) 14 If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. (persecuted for doing wrong) 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.**

**We are not to provoke persecution by our conduct.**

**Ex – I am being persecuted – no, you’re being a jerk.**

**To be blessed and possess the kingdom is the bear the kingdom – to live it – to walk in it even when those around you attack you.**

**The Beatitudes truly counter the culture… They stand at odds with the world. This persecution is because of righteous living unto God, not because of our opinions being attacked.**

* **The world cannot handle humility- in a state of self-promotion / ego**
* **The world cannot handle mourning over sin - as it promotes living according to our feelings and opinions – promoting sin.**
* **The world cannot handle submission to God - when it seeks to serve itself and do as we will.**
* **The world can not handle mercy and peace - as it promotes revenge, retaliation, and self-vindication.**

**The beatitudes are the pursuits of a disciple of Jesus and will inevitably result in rejection, slander, and persecution.**

**As much as the previous 7 are a normal marks of a disciple so is last. Persecution is in many ways - the beatitudes test.**

**Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will suffer for the righteousness they crave. It has been so in every age:**

**Pics -The early church – persecution – Thrown to lions, tared and used as living torches to light up streets of Rome, animal skins sewn to them with hunting dogs set lose to chase them, pulled apart on racks, molten lead poured on, red hot brass plates attached to them, eyes gouged out, body parts cut off, slowly boiled. Why? Because they stood for Jesus!**

**Pics - The church over the ages – persecution - History is filled w/ stories of men and women who stood in the face of resistance to share the gospel of Peace. Persecuted, attacked, murdered for the cause of Christ. Great stories of inspiration and courage! In 21st century - 150,000 Christians were killed each year. Roughly 1,100,000 Christians were martyred worldwide, between 2000-10.**

**Pics - Today – persecution - Today more than 60 countries attack Christians 320 killed every month for their faith, 1 every 6 minutes killed, 214 churches destroyed each month, 722 acts of violence (rounded up, imprisoned, raped, beaten, abducted, homes burned down, tortured, mutilated… 215 mil persecuted daily. Persecution had been greater the last 30 yrs than the first 300 yrs.**

**Maybe for you it’s taking a stand for righteousness of Jesus – refusing to get drunk, get high, sex outside marriage, participate in dirty jokes – the result your left out – not invited – nights alone – called names.**

**Maybe it’s taking a stand for the truth of Jesus – Jesus the one and only God of the universe, the savior, the only way - results in being mocked, looked down on, seen as narrow minded, disowned by family.**

**-If you cherish purity, it will considered an attack on a love for free sex.**

**-If you embrace temperance, it’s a statement against the love of alcohol**

**-If you choose to be merciful, you’ll be seen as being weak on justice**

**-If you live simply & content, you’ll be accused of being anti-capitalism**

**-If you walk humbly with your God, you will expose the evil of pride.**

**Under threat of losing our family, a job, our livelihood, safety, or being ostracized – we are often seen as the odd ones and looked down on. (How to thrive in a Babylon culture – online)**

**Why do people persecute Christians? Why are they so offended?**

* **They love the darkness (sin)**

**Jesus says there is such a thing as sin – that is offensive**

**John 3:20** **For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.” (Romans 1:18-32 talks about the same thing)**

**2 Tim 3:12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 13 while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.**

**To live a godly life is to pursue God’s definition of godly.**

* **They love the world (world’s system) –**

**Jesus calls us to live a different way – that is offensive**

**1 John 2:15** **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. 16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh (if it feels good I’m going to do it) and the desires of the eyes (If I see it and want it – I’m going to do what it takes to get it) and pride of life (I want to be famous and a person of power) - is not from the Father but is from the world.**

**Persecution from people is at times an attempt by them to justify their life choices and pursuits.**

**James 4:4 You adulterous people! (cheat on God like a marriage affair) Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity (hostility) with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.**

* **They are lost**

**Jesus claims to be the only way – that is offensive**

**1 Corinthians 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.**

**The message of salvation through faith in Jesus alone – not of out works. Denouncing the deity of Jesus and his message.**

**(1 Cor 1:23, 2 Cor 11:4, Ro 1:16, Col 1:15-23, Gal 1:8-9, Eph 2:8-10)**

* **They are not chosen**

**Jesus says not everyone his is child – that is offensive (Jo 1:12)**

**1 Peter 2:1-10 – 4 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him - 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood… 7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. (Jesus) But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” 8 and, “A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message - which is also what they were destined for. 9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.**

**How do you know if you are chosen? Have you bowed your knee to the king? Have you responded to the HS and turned to Jesus for salvation and stand strong in the face persecution? You’re Chosen (Phil 1:27-3, Eph1:4-5, Joh 6:44, 15:16, Ro 8:29-30, Matt 22:14, 2 Co 2:14-17)**

**If you’re being loving, compassionate, kind, and truthful about Jesus – and still being attacked, you must be doing it right. (Ac 5:41, He 11:32-40)**

**How are we to respond to the opposition:**

**In many ways we need only to see the previous beatitudes.**

**1 Peter 3:13** **Now, who will want to harm you if you are eager to do good? 14 But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don’t worry or be afraid of their threats. (Don’t be afraid of them) 15 Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. (Keep your allegiance to Christ) And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it.**

* **Speak – the truth**

**1 Peter 3:15 (NIV) …Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.**

**We don’t need to justify Jesus – we just need to share Him.**

**Ephesians 4:15 – Speak the truth in love… Speak the truth in love.**

* **Respect – Gentleness – listen first – quick to listen**

**1 Peter 3:16 But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ. 17 Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong!**

**Some Christians suffer for the wrong way they treat people.**

**It is possible to disagree and still respect someone.**

**Respect is about treating a person as a loved creation of God.**

**This next passage - Jesus gives us three responses**

**Luke 7:27 Listen to what I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.**

* **Love – compassion**

**Matthew 5:44 - love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you**

* **Bless – do good to them**

**Romans 12:14 - Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse.**

**Proverbs 25:21 - If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink…**

**In the middle of persecution Peter and Paul say - obey emperor Nero and the laws – be honorable citizens (Romans 13, 1 Peter 2:13-17, Titus 3:1)**

**Except when it contradicts God’s law - Civil disobedience**

**(Acts 4: 18-20, 5:28-29, James 4:17, Daniel 1-3)**

* **Pray – pray for their blessing**

**Matthew 5:44 …and pray for those who persecute you.**

**James gives us our last response - James 1:12 Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.**

* **Persevere - endure, continue, persist – don’t give up!**

**John 17:14 I (Jesus) have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. (you are in it for his purpose)**

**Matt 10:16-26 – Jesus said - I am sending you out like sheep among wolves… you will be handed over to be flogged in the synagogues… On my account… they will arrest you… your own families will betray you… but keep on going! Keep speaking the truth. The world hated me – it will hate you. 10:22 You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.**

**We are sent into this world to serve and point to Jesus.**

**Don’t retreat, don’t hide, don’t isolate – persevere!**

**Matthew 24:13 – those that endure to the end will be saved!**

**James 5:7-11 – we must persevere as those who have gone before us.**

**Hebrews 10:32-36 – though we are persecuted and lose things in this life – we persevere for a greater possession and a greater promise.**

**The response to persecution is never: hate more, grumble & complain more, attack, revenge, slander, get discouraged, give up and give in… But instead: love more, give more, pray more, forgive more, listen more**

**And don’t live in fear - do not fear man, fear God (Matt 10:28)**

**The world may persecute this flesh – but it will never and cannot defeat Christ and cannot defeat me – in Christ.**

**The very next thing Jesus says after this beatitude is this - Matthew 5:13 You are the salt of the earth… (season / preserve it - must be in it for it to work) 14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. (in this world - don’t hide your faith – be a light!) 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. (in your family - don’t give up and hide your faith – shine!) 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.**

**Are you feeling the heat? Press on – love more – pray more… endure – persevere! Don’t give in! Don’t give up – Light it up!**

**The big question - Persecution – How is it a blessing?**

**2 Cor 4:16-18, Hebrews 11, Philippians 3:10, 1 Peter 5:6-11, Philippines 1:27-10**

* **It brings us closer to Christ - as we identify with Christ and rely on him – it tells us we are His, loved and that Christ is with us.**
* **It brings us closer to other Christians - strengthens and unites us in shared experiences and a dependency on serving each other.**
* **It brings us closer to the kingdom of heaven – it gets our eyes on the Kingdom of heaven and on what matters in this life.**

**Matthew 5:10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 “Blessed are you… 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven…**

**Life Teams - How to live in a world of persecution**

**Next week – Coming Attractions!**