

The Mind of Christ - Lesson 72

September 18, 2020

Section 54 The Sermon on the Mount

A. T. Robertson's Harmony of the Gospels

Thank you for joining us for our continuation of the Mind of Christ. We are well into this series on the study of The Mind of Christ and we have reached the point of **The Sermon on the Mount**. The Sermon on the Mount covers all of Matthew 5, 6 and 7 so it will take us a little while to get through it. Some of the sermon is found in Luke 6 and we'll bring Luke into the picture whenever it's applicable.

Thank you for joining us. We're going to continue looking at the Beatitudes, and today's beatitude is found in **Matthew 5:10** where it says, ¹⁰ "Blessed are those who have been **persecuted** for the sake of *righteousness*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This beatitude is only found here; it is not found in Luke.

Now, every one of the beatitudes has a reward with it, and the reward that we see in this one is the same as the reward in the first one in **Matthew 5:3**, "Blessed are the Poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

Let's look at the idea of *righteousness*, because he introduces '*righteousness*' here as *the reason for the persecution*. He also used *righteousness* in the beatitude in **Matthew 5:6**, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for *righteousness*, for they shall be satisfied." They are hungering and thirsting after righteousness. The idea of **persecution**, though, is new and in fact, I believe this is the first time Jesus mentions any kind of **persecution** in regard to following Him. He will have a lot to say about this in the days to come.

What does this bring to the discussion or the teaching that we do not already have on the table? **Persecution is an action against someone who is weaker, or someone who is somewhat defenseless or helpless to prevent it.** Now this may only be because of choice because the person being persecuted may choose not to fight back; not to defend themselves and therefore be weaker because of that particular thing, but sometimes they're weaker simply because they're weaker than the one who is wielding the sword, if you will. It usually has some legal authority with it, and some physical ability to carry it out. There is usually a threat of harm, either physically or materially, and certainly socially, that is implied within the **persecution**. The persecuted stand to lose much ... even their own lives on some occasions. They may see their families being **persecuted** as a means of *them* being **persecuted**. The psychological implications are vast and pervasive; and there is stress, anxiety and fear and these can be major at times.

The *type* of **persecution** he is anticipating here is very clear. It is religious persecution or "*for the sake of righteousness*." Now, this may be a non-observation, but one that I think that I see; and that is the blessing is for the one who has been persecuted, not the one being persecuted.

Now, could it be that the blessing is harder to realize in the midst of the persecution than after it is over?

In other words, when you are going through the **persecution**, it may be more difficult to realize that *your reward* is “the Kingdom of Heaven”, but after you have endured the **persecution** and you look back on it, you may have a greater ability to appreciate the **persecution** that you have been through.

The word **persecuted** is a word that means “to put in rapid motion, to pursue, to follow, to pursue the direction of something, to follow eagerly, to endeavor earnestly, to acquire, to press forward, or to pursue with malignity”. It means “to chase”, if you will. So, someone who is being **persecuted** is being chased. Do you get the picture? It is one being chased or pursued with some intensity, urgency, and certainly with malignity.

Luke 17:23 uses the phrase “to run after” someone.

In **Romans 9:30-31** the Gentiles are not “pursuing” *righteousness*, and in not pursuing it, they have *attained it*. The Jews *were* pursuing a law of *righteousness*, but they *have not attained* it... The word **pursuing** here, in this context, is the word “**persecuted**” because that’s what the word means ... to chase after something.

In **Romans 12:13** it talks about pursuing hospitality. Just as Paul dragged people out of their ‘homes’ ... in other words ‘persecuted them’; *Christians* bring people into their homes. Do you see the reverse of this? Paul is persecuting people, he’s pursuing them and bringing them out of their homes. We are to pursue hospitality by bringing people into our homes.

The word is used in **Philippians 3:12** and **3:14** in the sense of pressing forward for the goal, the prize of the high calling of God. In other words, we’re **chasing after** the prize of the high calling of God. Do I press to this goal with the same intensity that a persecutor presses to destroy a Christian? Recall the zeal of Paul. Paul was very zealous and in his zeal he persecuted the church! Is **my** zeal; is **your** zeal for the high calling of God ever so much as intense as the zeal Paul had in pursuing Christians in **persecution**?

Paul refers to himself as a persecutor in **1 Timothy 1:13**. Now, think of being chased or pursued by one meaning to do you great harm. How could a person find blessing in this? How can homeostasis, the “okay-ness” of the Christian, be maintained when you’re always looking over your shoulder wondering who is going to capture you, hurt you or harm you? Could you really rest knowing someone is bent on destroying you?

The instruction Jesus gives regarding our response to **persecution** ... the persecutor is of great importance and can be applied to less stressful situations where our lives may **not** be at stake like places on our job, with our reputation, or our marital status, or our economic well-being. In other words, what we can learn here in this beatitude about being **persecuted** for *righteousness*’ sake may apply in situations that may be less intense than someone who is pursuing us to ‘take our lives’ in some kind of religious persecution ... but in this case, the **persecution** of for the sake of *righteousness*.

In **Matthew 5:11**, it is spoken of on account of ‘me’. In other words, it is people who are persecuted on account of Christ. Remember what we hunger and thirst for? Yes, that’s right ... righteousness. We hunger and thirst for righteousness.

So, might we understand Jesus to say, ‘for the sake of maintaining our appetite for righteousness’, we learn to respond properly to the **persecutor** lest he divert our attention and we lose our taste for a right relationship with God? In other words, what is happening to us in the midst of the **persecution**? Do we continue to pursue *righteousness* while we are being pursued by the **persecutor**?

Persecution, in other words someone chasing us, causes us often to focus on the **persecutor** in order to survive while *righteousness* is about **thriving**, not *surviving*...**thriving**. The goal is not to give the **persecutor** any power over us; so *righteousness must be maintained* during the **persecution**. But *righteousness* is also the reason “**for**” the **persecution**.

Why would someone **persecute** another person ‘for pursuing righteousness’? Why would that be an occasion for persecution? Well, one might disagree as to how *righteousness* is obtained but if another person really desires a good relationship with God, then we should be happy that someone is pursuing *righteousness*. But for the Jewish persecution of Christians, they thought their *righteousness* was enhanced **by** destroying Christians who pursued *righteousness* through Jesus Christ. In other words, they thought that their “right relationship with God” was being enhanced or was being improved because they were **persecuting** Christians.

So, is the motivation “*control*”, merely wanting to control others, or does it run deeper than that ... perhaps “twisted honor”? Paul provides a sense of insight into this so we’re asking the question, “How and why does a person become a persecutor?” Why do they do that to other people? Here is the insight we’ve gained from the life of Paul since he lived on both sides of this equation. He was both the **persecutor** and then he became the **persecuted**.

In **1 Timothy 1:13**, Paul describes himself as a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent man, an aggressor. He says he acted ignorantly in unbelief. Now that is a very important phrase here because we get insight into why Paul was doing what he was doing. He acted ignorantly in unbelief. Two ingredients are always present in the persecutor.

The first ingredient is ignorance and the second ingredient is unbelief. The person is ignorant of something, obviously. They do not know and they may not care to know what would make a difference in their actions. In other words, they have pursued a course of action – **persecution**, and they may not want to even understand why they shouldn’t be doing that. More knowledge does not mean agreement, but it does provide understanding, and with that comes, perhaps, some compassion and sympathy for other people.

So how should we even *understand* the **persecutor**? Perhaps we should try to understand the **persecutor** by having more understanding of why they do what they do.

Clearly, Paul did not believe in Jesus, and he felt like those who **did** were a threat to Judaism. Their means of salvation were, by that time, diametrically opposed to one another. The way the Jews pursued righteousness was through Law and the Christians were pursuing righteousness through grace, though he learned, in other words, the ignorance was averted, that God’s means of salvation had always been “grace” or “righteousness by faith.”

Before the Damascus Road experience Paul opposed Christians ... by why 'violently'? Why did Paul violently oppose Christians? Why Stephen? Why in **Acts 8:3** did Paul begin ravaging the church entering house after house and dragging off men and women? He would put them in prison. The word 'ravage' means to soil, or to insult, or to make havoc. Paul would loosen, he would break up or destroy or dissolve ... these are the actions that Paul took towards the church of his day.

In **Philippians 3:6** Paul mentioned "zeal" to describe his actions as a **persecutor**. Paul burned with zeal for God which led him to burn with zeal *against* those "he thought" opposed God. Truly, persecution to the persecutor is holy war. As the Muslim would say, it is Jihad. In Paul's life he had 'confidence in the flesh' as the basis for his persecution. So, when you combine *ignorance* and *unbelief*, and then you add to it *fleshly confidence*, you have "*the making of persecution.*"

Now I want you to reflect on those who persecuted Jesus for insight. In **John 16:2** Jesus further explains that the **persecutor** will 'think' that he is *offering service to God*. It seems that in this particular place, he thinks he's actually worshiping God by persecuting other Christians. It may seem strange that someone who is a **persecutor** would think that it is part of their worship to God; their service to God to actually persecute other people.

Well, it dawned on me that "for the sake of *righteousness*" can be taken two ways. Who is under consideration ... the **persecutor** or the **persecuted**? When I look at **John 16:1-2** and **Philippians 3** the motive of the persecutor could be, also, *righteousness*. They may be persecuting because they think it is the righteous thing to do!

Now, I doubt that this is it, but it is possible to view this passage in this way. If it were, it would certainly imply the persecuted is so because of their different pursuit of righteousness. In other words, there are two different pursuits here! One is pursuing righteousness by **persecuting** a Christian, and the Christian is pursuing righteousness **because of** or **by** their **faith in Jesus!**

Well, the opposite is true ... that the **persecuted** implies that the **persecutor** is also pursuing righteousness. The problem, either way, is that the two paths or ways of righteousness are in *direct conflict* with one another! Righteousness by faith clashes with righteousness by works. Such called for a sharp rebuke! We see that in **Titus 1:3** and of course, Jesus' famous sermon in **Matthew 23**. The fact that people chase or pursue righteousness **does not** mean the pursuit is holy, right and sanctified. There must be the **right way** and His name is Jesus who IS the way. That is the only way to pursue righteousness.

Matthew 5:11 says "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me." In other words, why are they persecuting Christians ... "**on account of Me**" Jesus says. In **Matthew 10:18** Jesus tells the apostles they will be brought before governors and kings for "**my sake**". In **Matthew 10:39** He speaks of our losing our lives for "**my sake**" ... for the sake of Jesus. This is a key ★ verse. "Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it." Giving up one's life for another is noble ... usually, but giving up one's life for Jesus, because of Him and His influence, His control, His hold on my life, is divine.

On account of; for the sake of, by reason of, why do we allow ourselves to be persecuted instead of fighting back? Because it is for Jesus, it is for Him, it is for His sake.

Why would anyone embrace a position that would put their lives, their families, their wealth, their reputation at risk, knowingly, accepting persecution; not looking for it; but if it comes because one believes in and follows Jesus; is what Jesus is pronouncing a blessing over. This is our *laying down our lives for Jesus*. This is our saying ‘nothing is more important than Jesus, including my mental and physical well-being. Jesus will say more about this beatitude than the others. He’s going to say more about this one than any other. And He will spend considerable time elsewhere on it too. Jesus knows that this is a big deal.

Now, the outcome is the Kingdom of Heaven. Both *righteousness* and *kingdom* are together as in **Matthew 6:33** where Jesus says, “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” the two things we see as priorities in our lives. In **Mathew 5:12**, Jesus says “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” The Kingdom of Heaven seems to be stressing the afterlife which would make sense since many of the persecuted were killed or martyred for their faith. For their knowing this life was not all would be very practical and very encouraging in the face of their deaths.

The Kingdom was to be possessed. Theirs **is** the kingdom of heaven. It is to be possessed by them. So how do we possess it? How do we own the kingdom? The kingdom is a gift, just as is *righteousness* a gift. When we accept the gift, it is ours until we forfeit it ... which is not ‘Calvinistically’ correct but I believe it’s Biblically correct.

So, in Jesus’ mind persecution for the right reason was not bad, but good because of the reward. But is this similar to the idea in Islam, that to die, even in a suicide bombing carries with it some ‘immediate’ reward? It’s almost like a “payoff” for a job. This sounds too much like payment for work which is not the Gospel.

God is not obligated to the martyr to provide the kingdom to Him. He is not conducting a business transaction. Jesus is simply, in all the beatitudes, stating the natural outcomes tied to certain behaviors on the part of God-followers. God’s gifts flow into the lives of His children. He loves to do so. So our choice is to endure persecution and not to deny Him. His choice of faithfulness is to provide what we need. He does this out of His own character, and not as a payment for any ‘work’ we have completed.

The Kingdom rule extends to the next life ... His will done in heaven as well as on earth. The veil of death is not a boundary. It is very much as a seamless passage by which we experience there more real than we experience it here. In other words, we experience there, something that is more real than we experience right here.

We are blessed because God has made it possible to begin eternal life **now** and to pass unhindered into a more complete aspect of it in the presence of God where faith has been made sight. No doubt, the kingdom then is the same as the kingdom here, but we will be able to experience it more fully.

Now, in **Matthew 5:11**, Jesus continues to define certain aspects of **persecution**. He gives three. He talks about insults, persecution, and false and evil speaking.

The ‘insult’ is to censor someone, to upbraid or to revile. To insult someone is oppressive language. In **Matthew 11:20** Jesus does this against the cities where He did miracles but was not accepted; Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. He pronounces a ‘woe’ and assigns them to judgment and to the depths of Hades. He compares them to the notorious cities of Tyre and Sidon and Sodom. So we have an example of reproach and here it’s deserved and is served up by the Son of God. But it’s the same kind of reproach that is given to Christians not because they deserve it, but simply because people are trying to insult them.

In **Mark 16:14** Jesus reproached the disciples for their unbelief and their hardness of heart because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. In both cases, the reason for Jesus’ reproach is because of unbelief and hardness of heart.

In **James 1:5** the one who asked for wisdom God gives generously without reproach ... in other words, without insult. Why ... because this person is not set on unbelief and hardness. He is looking for wisdom from God.

1 Timothy 3:7 is speaking of an elder who has a ‘good reputation with those outside the church’ so that he will not fall into reproach. In other words, he will not have an opportunity for people to insult him or to upbraid him over something. An elder does not need to be spoken of disparagingly because, as Peter taught in **1 Peter 2:20**, it should not be because of something evil he has done. There is no benefit to suffering from a real offense that has occurred.

In **Romans 15:3** it says that when we identify with another we take part in any insults leveled against them and they will also fall on us and so if I befriend someone who is being insulted, I may also become the target of the insults in the sense that if I’m siding with someone who is being bullied, the bully may start bullying me.

The quote is from an unknown origin, or at least unknown to me, (**Romans 15:3**) ... it’s not only my willingness to be insulted for the sake of Jesus, taking His insult on myself, but also taking on the insults of fellow Christians. Standing with someone even when it is unpopular is noble *as long as the stand itself is noble*.

In **1 Peter 2:23** it says that when Jesus was being reviled, He did not revile in return. The word here means ‘to vilify’. In **John 9:28** speaking of the blind man, it says “they reviled him.”

In **Acts 23:4** when Paul called the High Priest a “white washed wall” some of the bystanders asked if he were reviling the High Priest and Paul said he wasn’t aware that he was the High Priest, probably meaning that he did not recognize him as such.

In **Acts 23:5** Paul quotes **Exodus 22:28** which says you shall not speak evil against a ruler of your people. All of this goes back to the word that is used here in **Matthew 5:11** about insulting people.

In **1 Corinthians 4:12** Paul says that when we are reviled, we are to bless. When we are persecuted we are to endure it. Though it may be hard to distinguish this word from the one in **Matthew 5:11**, “insult”, the message is that we must be careful in our response to those who would attack us in our attempt to represent Jesus. At times we should make it clear that they bring reproach on themselves and at other times we simply bless them and not respond.

Paul says in **Romans 12:14** that we should bless those who persecute us; bless and curse not. In **Romans 12:17** never pay back evil for evil. In **verses 19-21** we feed our enemy, we do not take revenge, but rather overcome evil with good. Of course, Jesus is the example on the cross and it’s very clear. Insults were hurled at Him and He did not respond in kind.

Skipping to the third aspect of persecution which is **saying** all kinds of evil against one **falsely**, we might say, ‘making up bad things to say about us’, slander, false accusations, insinuations, wanting people to believe evil about you or about another person; this is aimed at one’s reputation.

Proverbs 6:16-19 regarding the seven things which are an abomination to God, two-thirds of them apply to this particular aspect of persecution. They are “a lying tongue, a heart that devises wicked plans,¹⁹ a false witness who utters lies, and one who speaks strife among brothers.”

Our words are the transactions of life. It is our currency. Like the dollar, when the currency loses its value and cannot be trusted, we cannot be sure of truth and we turn to self-protection. In other words, if we’re going to ‘trade’ in words, we must be sure that we maintain the value of our words by only speaking the truth. The evil said is a **lie**. The word here means to speak falsely, deceitfully, or to utter falsehood.

In **Romans 9:1** Paul, for emphasis, says “I am not lying.” In **Acts 5:3** Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit. In **Acts 6:13** the enemies of Stephen put forth false witnesses. In **Revelation 2:2** of those who lie about being apostles. **Revelation 21:8** assigns all liars to the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. **John 8:44** identifies the origin of such language ... Satan, who is the false accuser; the father of lies. There is ***no truth*** in him.

In **Ephesians 4:25** Paul urges the laying aside of all falsehood and learning to speak the language of truth to our neighbor since we are members of one another. **2 Thessalonians 2:9** includes ‘false’ or ‘lying wonders’. In **Romans 3:6-8** Paul equates unrighteousness with a lie. Since Jesus is truth, then lies in any form are opposed to this.

What are the natural outcomes to being accused of evil falsely? Well, it depends on if anyone actually believes the false charge. It is difficult to prove something that is not true. Everyone expects a guilty person to say that the charge is false. Jails are filled with folks who didn’t “do it”.

Jesus adds “all kinds of evil” to the mix. There is no limit to what one can say if it is false. ***Truth limits speech to what is actually true. A lie is unlimited in scope.*** A small lie can be as damaging as a large lie, though a distinction is hard to make.

Jesus had many charges made against Him. For example, ‘He opposed Caesar’, ‘He was going to tear down the Temple’, and ‘He violated the Sabbath’. When someone’s motive is to destroy another, carefully checking facts or seeking to fully understand another’s position is not always top priority. We assume we know it all and that any protest is merely a pathetic defense of truth. **Matthew 5:11** also uses persecution, again, to be pursued, as we’ve already talked about.

The response Jesus commands is “rejoice and be glad”. **Rejoice** is to be cheerful, to be calmly happy or to be well off. The Wise Men were rejoicing exceedingly with great joy in **Matthew 2:10** at seeing the star. The shepherd who finds the lost sheep rejoices more over it than the ninety-nine who were not lost in **Matthew 18:13**.

Notice what evil people **rejoice** in. **Mark 14:11** says, on hearing Judas was going to betray Jesus, the chief priests rejoiced in that. In **Luke 6:23** in the same beatitude context it says, ‘be glad in that day and leap for joy’. In **Luke 10:20** Jesus tells his disciples not to rejoice in ‘the Spirit submitting to them’, but that ‘their names have been written in heaven’. And John the Baptist explains that “the friend of the Bridegroom rejoices greatly at the Bridegroom’s voice and so this joy of mine has been made full” in **John 3:29**.

Perhaps strangely, in **John 11:15** Jesus “was glad” *He was not there* when Lazarus died because of an *opportunity for faith*. In **John 14:28** the disciples should have rejoiced to hear that Jesus was going to the Father because the Father is greater. In **Philippians 1:18**, Paul rejoices that **Christ is proclaimed**. In **Philippians 2:17-18** they should rejoice at Paul being poured out like a drink offering, and in **Philippians 2:28** Paul is sending Epaphroditus to them so that they would have opportunity to rejoice. Again, in **Philippians 3:1** and **4:4** Paul says, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice.” *In sharing in the sufferings of Christ, we rejoice in view of His coming*. And then joy we will have **1 Peter 4:13** ... (but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.) This has worked into a greeting in **Acts 15:23** and **Acts 23:26** (simply ‘Greetings.’). It’s also in **James 1:1**. In **2 John 2:10** says we are not to give false teachers a ‘greeting’.

Opportunities for rejoicing include Jesus’ first coming, finding the lost, our names being written in heaven, hearing Jesus’ voice, and ‘opportunity for faith to be built’, ‘Jesus being with the Father’, that ‘Christ is proclaimed’, and ‘to be able to suffer with Jesus’.

Now, I want to end there because we’re not really finished with this idea of **persecution**. But one of the reasons I wanted to give you this list, and go into detail about the various things that we’re to rejoice about; when we’re told to “rejoice in our sufferings”, it think it needs to be put in context of all the things that we rejoice about. *When we see that we have much to rejoice about as a Christian*, then we can find **joy in suffering** for the “cause of Christ” because of all the other things that we have to rejoice in.

So it becomes, not something that we shun or that we see as something inherently bad, but we see it simply as simply the fact that we have been blessed so much in Christ that even for us to be able to rejoice in the suffering with Christ is not an imposition on us.

Now, one of the things I'm going to do when we come back next time is that, even though we're not very far into the Sermon on the Mount, I'm going to take some time to review some of the things that we have already talked about in the Sermon on the Mount. And there are quite a few things that I want to bring to your attention because I don't want to just run through material here without us, hopefully, trying to retain some things.

In the course of that, after I'm finished with that, we're going to talk about **persecution** some more, because Jesus has more to say about **persecution** in this beatitude than he does in any of the other beatitudes that we've studied thus far.

This is enough for today. And, again, I encourage you. These are in-depth Bible studies that get into a lot of Scripture and the best way to study this is with a *pause button* and a **Bible** where you can look up the Scriptures and one by one, you can piece together the understanding of what Jesus is saying. By doing so, we will gain the mind of Christ.

Again, thank you for joining me. God bless.