

This morning we close our study of what is commonly referred to as the Beatitudes. Maybe a more apt title for this portion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount would be, "Traits of a True Christian." Each statement we have studied reveals a necessary characteristic of Christ followers as well as a promise to those who embody such attributes (and only to those who exhibit them).

Before we delve into the final Beatitude, and one that is not stressed enough in our modern American churches, let's have a brief review to help us see how they are connected.

1. True Christians recognize their spiritual poverty and the utter hopelessness of their efforts. This recognition leads to . . .
2. True Christians mourning their sinfulness and its impact on their life and relationship with God. Realizing their low estate . . .
3. True Christians exhibit humility and gentleness in their relationships. This involves their relationship with God and with fellow members of the human race. This humility creates . . .
4. A hunger and thirst for righteousness in the true Christian. Seeking God and his glory becomes their greatest desire. As they grow in righteousness, they realize the mercy they have been shown and . . .
5. True Christians show mercy to others because they themselves have experienced the life changing power of God's mercy. In order to grow in righteousness and show mercy . . .
6. True Christians give their control center, the biblical heart or modern brain/will, to God to be purified and made holy. As part of their effort to live holy lives . . .
7. True Christians make peace with God and seek to live at peace with their fellow man. They realize that living at peace with God and man are often incompatible because of the holiness of God and the fallenness of man . . .

This leads us to the 8th trait of true Christians which is not only not taught enough, its opposite is preached to thousands on a weekly basis. This has created a Christian crisis in our country. For you see, if some of these false prophets of health and wealth and these prosperity preachers tried to sell their false gospel in places like China, Iran, Iraq, Syria, or other nations hostile to Christianity they would be heralded as the heretics that they are. Only in a nation of spoiled people can such a soft message be accepted as "truth." It's actually part of an ugly cycle. Due to the freedoms we have in our nation, this biblical truth has been forgotten and even dismissed as reality. As a result, we have become pampered brats instead of persevering believers. We have bought the lie that Christianity leads to an easier life or the "American dream." We shirk our responsibility and shrink in the face of resistance. We are no longer capable of withstanding what the Bible teaches us is

inevitable and undeniable: True Christians will face persecution. And we are not only to embrace it, we are to rejoice in it; knowing that our Savior suffered persecution for our sake and in sharing in similar sufferings we bring God glory. Scripture: Matthew 5:10-12

## I. Persecution Promises

### A. **Promise of Persecution**

1. "When" not "If" (11)
  - a) 2 Timothy 3:12
  - b) James 1: 2
  - c) Luke 21:12a
  - d) John 15:20
  - e) 1 Peter 4:12
  - f) Righteousness is confrontational by contrast
    - (1) Confronting rather than conforming
  - g) A sign of a true Christian living a truly Christian life
    - (1) A Christian who is popular with the world does not reveal a raising of worldly standards but a lowering of Christian standards
    - (2) Being a people pleaser means that you are not a God pleaser (Luke 6:26)
    - (3) We are not called to be politically correct. We are called to be biblically correct.
2. What it may look like
  - a) Persecution (physical)
    - (1) Abuse
      - (a) Jesus
      - (b) Paul
    - (2) Abandonment (Luke 6:22)
  - b) Insult
    - (1) Name calling
    - (2) Mocking/Marginalizing (Matt. 26:67-68)
  - c) Slander
    - (1) False accusations behind your back (Matt. 26:59-60)

### B. **Promise to Persecuted**

1. Overwhelmingly blessed (10, 11)
  - a) "Blessed" X2
2. Owners of the Kingdoms (10)
  - a) Co-heirs with Christ
3. Overcomers through Christ
  - a) John 16:33

b) Rom. 8:37

C. **Proper Attitude toward Persecution**

1. Don't seek persecution by being ungodly
  - a) 1 Peter 3:15-26
  - b) 1 Peter 4:15
2. Don't shrink from persecution for being godly
  - a) Stephen (Acts 6-8)
3. Don't surrender the joy of faithfulness when being persecuted
  - a) Your great reward (12)
  - b) You're in good company (Hebrews 11-12:3)
  - c) Your growth is imminent (James 1:2-4)

Reggie White was a Hall of Fame football player. His nickname was "The Minister of Defense." He got that name in part because he was the greatest defensive lineman to ever play the game. But he also earned the moniker because he was an ordained minister. He was highly respected among his peers and those outside the sports world. He had several endorsement deals, rather rare for a defensive player at the time.

Then came March 26, 1998. White had been invited to speak to the Wisconsin State Assembly. In that speech he proclaimed that homosexuality is a sin. The next day he refused to back down from his comments saying, "I mentioned our country is headed in the wrong direction because we sit back and watch sin and let it happen. It's destroying our country and will until we have men and women that stand up and speak out."

As a result, the companies with which he had endorsements dropped him. It is believed, although denied) that CBS withdrew a \$6 million dollar contract offer to be on their NFL pregame crew.

I remember seeing an interview in the days and weeks following the remarks that have earned him the label of "extremist'," "bigot," "homophobe," and "insane." In the interview he basically said, "... I would rather God not be mad at me and let people be mad at me, so I have to speak the truth -- no matter the consequences."

He never bemoaned the millions of dollars his adherence to God's Word cost him. The following is from a Dec. 27, 2004 article on White's death from bpnews.net:

The critics, White said, didn't bother him. They only let him know what he was doing was right.

"My main critic is Satan himself, and I don't have to respond to him," he told Focus on the Family. "I pray for those who are critical and I pray for those who are walking in sin. I know that I was in sin and God delivered me. I want people to experience that same thing."

Such is the attitude we should have when persecution comes our way. If we are persecuted for standing on biblical truth we should remember that the criticism is coming from Satan and we don't have to respond to him because he has been defeated. We should be moved to pray for those who persecute us to be delivered. We should rejoice in the joy we bring God when we suffer for his glory.