

BEGINNING MIDDLE BEGINNING

Matthew 5:11-12 *"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*

The Beatitudes actually end where they began, with the Kingdom of God. In Western story telling we like everything to move in a definitive line, but Hebrew story telling always returns to the ideal, the beginning. Many times when Jesus has said in the Sermon on the Mount, "You have heard that it was said" (Matt 5:17, 38) then He would then go on to say what God's intent was from the beginning. There are other places in the scriptures that Jesus actually does say, "but it was not so from the beginning" (Matt 19:8).

These phrases emphasize that God is redeeming his creation, renewing His creation, because it is "good." He is returning it to the beginning. In the same way the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount follow this same ideal and returns itself to the "Kingdom of God."

Jesus in Matt 5:11-12 also re-emphasizes the persecution that will come when we begin to live for the gospel. He actually uses some new words to explain this. 5:11-12 *"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me (NIV). Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."* Jesus takes them back to the beginning and then makes it personal, because they are being slandered because of "me" (Jesus).

Here are the words:

- **persecuted** [dioko]: it means to pursue and prosecute
- **revile** [oneidos]: it means to reproach to defame
- **evil** [poneros]: This is different that the first time Jesus uses persecuted, this means harsh labor, pain, it is the idea of an evil which corrupts others.
- **falsely** [pseudoma]: to cheat, defraud (pseudo), falsify.

When people say false things about Jesus' disciples (in V12) it is not merely lying in the sense that the statements are false, but in the sense of deliberately inventing improbable lies because they not only dislike them, but hate Jesus. The last two verses of the Beatitudes switch from the third person to second person in narration; some commentators believe this is to reinforce that these two verses are written to the disciples and not the church as a whole, while others believe it reinforces that it is for everyone.

Verse 11 extends the persecution of v. 10 to include insult, persecution, and slander (Luke 6:22-23 adds hate). The reason for the persecution in Matthew 5:10 is "because of righteousness"; now, Jesus says, it is "because of me." This confirms that the righteousness of life that is in view is in imitation of Jesus. Jesus places Himself on a par with God when He likens the disciples persecution with the persecution of the prophets and martyrs .

Opposition is sure to happen according to Jesus because the disciples are aligning themselves with the Old Testament prophets who were persecuted before them (2 Chronicles 24:21; Nehemiah 9:26; Jeremiah 20:2). This biblical perspective was part of the historical basis on which Jesus built his own implied prediction that His followers would be persecuted.

These verses neither encourage seeking persecution nor permit retreating from it, sulking, or retaliation. From the perspective of both redemptive history ("the prophets") and eternity ("reward in heaven"), these verses constitute the reasonable response of faith, one which the early Christians understood. Bonhoeffer said, "Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer. In fact it is a joy and a token of his grace"

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