

Matthew 5:10-12
 Sermon on the Mount
 MT1010

May 9, 2010 am
 The Beatitudes

“PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS”

INTRODUCTION: I remember reading a novel in high school that impacted me profoundly...

1. It was the 1960 book by **Harper Lee** with the title *To Kill a Mockingbird*, published when I was in the 6th grade and read when I was in the 9th grade, that became a Pulitzer Prize Winner.
2. In this novel, set in fictional Maycomb County, Alabama, in 1936, a small town attorney named **Atticus Finch** defends an African American man falsely accused of raping a white girl. **Tom Robinson** was innocent, but an all white jury convicts against overwhelming evidence to the contrary. While in jail, awaiting an appeal, Tom is shot to death, supposedly for trying to escape. Atticus Finch defends this man’s innocence at the risk of his name in town, the future of his law practice, and the safety of himself and his two children – Scout (daughter) and Jem (son) – whom he is raising as his own as a widowed father.
3. Few people in fictional literature rise to the heroic level of **Atticus Finch**. This character, played by **Gregory Peck** in the 1962 film by the same name, won the Oscar for best lead actor for Peck. In all, it gathered 3 Oscar awards in 1962. The film defined Gregory Peck’s career.
4. *To Kill a Mockingbird* remains one of my favorite movies of all times.
5. One reviewer of the book commented on the title of the novel (*Wikipedia*; p. 10)

Songbirds and their associated symbolism appear throughout the novel. The family's last name of Finch also shares Lee's mother's maiden name. The titular mockingbird is a key motif of this theme, which first appears when Atticus, having given his children air-rifles for Christmas, allows their Uncle Jack to teach them to shoot. Atticus warns them that, although they can "shoot all the Bluejays they want", they must remember that "it's a sin to kill a mockingbird". Confused, Scout approaches her neighbor Miss Maudie, who explains that mockingbirds never harm other living creatures. She points out that mockingbirds simply provide pleasure with their songs, saying, "They don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us." "To kill a mockingbird' is to kill that which is innocent and harmless—like Tom Robinson."
6. There is something grand and noble about a person who will stand up for what is *right*, even when that righteousness is immensely unpopular.
7. Jesus notices these sorts of noble souls in the great crowd watching Him preach. He speaks directly to them...
 - a. *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

“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. (Matthew 5:10-12)
 - b. Commentators notice that, in fact, there are two Beatitudes here...

- c. *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* (Matthew 5:10)
- d. *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.* (Mt. 5:11-12)
- e. In truth: *There are really only 8 Beatitudes.*
- f. This “Ninth Blessing” in verses 11-12 is an intensification of #8.
 - i. *Blessed are **those** who are persecuted for righteousness' sake...*
 - ii. *Blessed are **you** when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account...*

iii. **Note:** a change from third person (v. 10) to second person (vv. 11-12)

8. Christ's point is this: *There is a blessing in store for those noble souls willing to suffer wrong for standing up for what is right. And there is nothing more right and nothing more worth suffering for than faith in Jesus Christ.*

9. Jesus Christ has now come to the end of the continuum of mankind and their various spiritual conditions.

- a. The *Poor in Spirit* who bring nothing but spiritual bankruptcy into the Kingdom of God
- b. The ascending order of spiritual health: *the mournful, the meek, the hungering and thirsting for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers...*
- c. And now: the most noble of them all: *The Martyr...*

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

10. **Remember:** These are **not** qualifications in order to enter the Kingdom of God...

These are **not** qualities that we should aspire to or develop in order to be accepted by God...

These are **not** character traits that we inherit once we enter the Kingdom of God...

These are spiritual conditions we find ourselves in when Jesus invites us into His new realm: *the Kingdom of Heaven.*

11. **James Bryan Smith:** *The Good and Beautiful Life: Putting on the Character of Christ* (pp. 55-56)

- a. A book about the Sermon on the Mount
- b. Orientation to the Beatitudes...

The broken down, sinful, ragamuffins of Israel flocked to Jesus. They tore apart roofs, climbed trees and formed huge crowds to see him. They knew he offered a vast treasure and was giving it away freely to everyone. Jesus was roaming Galilee telling everyone that God loves them, that God wants to commune with them and bless them, no matter who they are or what they have done, regardless of their gender or ethnicity. And he was not just saying nice things; he is healing people too. This was no ordinary man; God was with him—and he proclaimed that we

too have access to God! Those not on the guest list are invited into the Kingdom of God. Now we can better understand what Jesus is saying in the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes, far from being a new set of virtues that further divide the religious haves and have nots, are words of hope and healing to those who have been marginalized.

12. Jesus is turning His religious world (Judaism) upside down!

- a. In the Jewish mind of Christ's day, people who entered the Kingdom of God all met five requirements.
 - i. They were Jews, sons of Abraham.
 - ii. They were mostly male: some rabbis even taught that women were mere property who did not have the same souls as men!
 - iii. They were law-keepers: holy, ritually pure, and decent in lifestyle.
 - iv. They were physically whole and healthy: sickness indicated God's displeasure; deformities and disease made one a spiritual outcast.
 - v. They were financially sound: Poverty indicated the abandonment of God. The poor were uninvited.

b. **James Bryan Smith:** *The Good and Beautiful Life* (p. 55)

Those who could enter the Kingdom of God comprised an exclusive club: they were Jewish, male, religiously upright, healthy and wealthy. Jesus' ministry ran counter to this narrative. Jesus blessed the poor, touched lepers, healed and forgave Gentiles (even female Gentiles), and notoriously sinful females!

c. Jesus destroyed this false sense of spiritual pride...

"What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him. (Matthew 21:28-32)

13. **The key truth about salvation:** *Whatever you bring in your soul to the Kingdom of God is unacceptable, whether you're a "spiritual zero" or a courageous martyr for what is right. What you need to enter the Kingdom of God is never found in you but always and only found in Jesus Christ.*

14. **Augustus Toplady:** *Rock of Ages...*

Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling; naked, come to Thee for dress, Helpless, look to Thee for grace; Foul, I to the fountain fly, Wash me, Savior, or I die!

15. This is true, even of those willing to be persecuted for doing the right thing...

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

I. THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE

1. *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake..."*
2. Literally: *"Happy are the ones persecuted for the sake of righteousness..."*
 - a. The verb is *dioko*: persecute, pursue, chase after, seek out/after; drive out or away.
 - b. The perfect tense indicates a persecution in the past that continues into the present. (enduring persecution)
 - c. Matthew uses this verb 6 times – 4 of them in this chapter. (vv. 10, 11, 12, 44)
 - d. **Leon Morris**: *Matthew; Pillar NTC; p. 101*

But in the New Testament it is mostly used of inflicting suffering on people who hold beliefs that the establishment frowns on, and it is the kind of persecution of which Jesus speaks here.

3. Are these people Jesus refers to believers? Godly people? Christians? They **can** be and **often are**, but this is not why they are received into the Kingdom of God.
 - a. Some in the early church believed that martyrdom automatically guaranteed you a place in heaven.
 - b. The final and ultimate *"meritorious act."*
 - c. In fact, during the **Donatist Controversy** in the 4th century, some believed that those who had caved in under persecution but later come back to the church could not be received into the church, take the sacraments or be saved.
 - d. Martyrdom began to be sought by some as a way to guarantee one's own salvation.
 - e. *Martyrdom became glorified in the early church.*
 - f. **Please Note:** This is very similar to the way some Muslim fundamentalists believe: Death during *Jihad* (holy war) makes a Muslim a martyr and assures him of a place in heaven. These martyrs are the *Shahid*.

*Allah hath purchased of the believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return) is the Garden (of Paradise): they fight in His Cause, and **slay and are slain**: a promise binding on Him in Truth, through the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran: and who is more faithful to his Covenant than Allah? Then rejoice in the bargain which ye have concluded: that is the achievement supreme.*

- g. *This, of course, is **not** what Jesus is teaching.*
- h. **Please note:** The reward for the poor in spirit and those persecuted for righteousness is the same: *"theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

- i. So...there is no special reward for martyrs different or greater than others who enter the Kingdom of God.

4. **Dallas Willard** explains what Jesus was pointing to in this Beatitude... (*The Divine Conspiracy*; pp. 118-119)

Those who are attacked because of their stand for what is right. These often not only suffer momentary harassment, but see their lives ruined or are killed simply for refusing to be compliant with what is wrong. Laws are sometimes passed to protect “whistle-blowers” in certain cases, but what the law can protect you from falls far short of the damage that is often done. Most of what is wrong in human affairs simply can’t be dealt with by law. It is a terrible position to be in.

5. **James Bryan Smith** adds this obvious observation...

We rightly esteem those willing to suffer for their faith. I read with awe the stories of men and women who accept martyrdom with courage and even joy. But this certainly is not valued in this world. We are easily offended by a slight criticism. We want everyone in it to think well of us. We want praise, not persecution. Jesus observes that those who pursue righteousness are going against the grain of society, and that will result in persecution.

6. **D. A. Carson** clarifies what Jesus was saying (*Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount*; p. 28)

This final Beatitude does not say, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because they are objectionable, or because they rave like wild-eyed fanatics, or because they pursue some religio-political cause.” The blessing is restricted to those who suffer persecution because of righteousness.

7. Are these persecuted souls already believers? Obviously, this would be so...

- a. People like John the Baptist and the Old Testament prophets
- b. The very ones Jesus points to in verse 12
- c. God-fearing, righteous people, waiting for the Messiah and willing to suffer wrong-doing rather than renounce God’s way
- d. *Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...* (2 Tim. 3:12)

8. But these are also *unbelievers* who are willing to suffer wrong-doing for the cause of righteousness:

- a. Some do so unexpectedly. The visceral reaction of a bent world surprises them, but they stick to their guns.
- b. Others anticipate the ostracism, character assassinations and abuse they receive simply by going against the grain of political correctness.
- c. A few actually look for persecution. They love to “play the martyr,” but even in this, they persist in doing what’s right.
- d. **Examples** can be found in many walks of life:

- i. The three civil rights workers murdered in Neshoba County, Mississippi, in 1964, for registering black voters.
 - ii. A journalist who loses his job because his editorial exposes the dishonesty of his own profession.
 - iii. The pastor, fired because he doesn't tell people what they want to hear, even though he himself is not saved.
 - iv. That awkward person who always asks the question no one wants to answer because it makes things more difficult by forcing us to look at right and wrong.
9. **Please understand:** *People can heroically stand up for righteousness, even risking their lives to do so, without understanding or possessing the righteousness of Christ as a true believer in the Gospel.*

- a. How is this so? Because of God's *common grace*, the general revelation of *natural law*, and the ever-present promptings of the *human conscience*.
- b. Let me show you this in Romans 2:12-16

For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. (Romans 2:12-16)

- c. The Scripture seems to present several people like this: unconverted but righteous people...
 - i. *After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue." (Luke 7:1-5)*
 - ii. *At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. (Acts 10:1-2)*
 - iii. *Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream." (Mt. 27:19)*
 - iv. *And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the Council, who*

was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. (Mark 15:42-43)

- v. *Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?” (John 7:50-51)*

10. Jesus speaks here to the morally “high end” of the human scale: *People whose lives reflect a constant search for truth, a noble commitment to justice, righteousness and decency, and a willingness to pay the price for doing what everyone, deep down, knows is right.*

11. These people may not yet be saved, but they are very, very close to the Kingdom of God!

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” And the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions. (Mark 12:28-34)

12. Those noble people are looking for the one thing that seems to evade them in their cause of righteousness: The Righteous One!

II. THOSE WHO RECEIVE GOD’S KINGDOM

1. *“...for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*
2. I have mentioned before that Matthew presents here an *inclusio*...
 - a. From where we get our word “inclusion”
 - b. A literary or oratorical device used to “sandwich” the first and last items in a list
 - i. *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:3)*
 - ii. *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:10)*
 - c. Indicating that everything in between (Beatitudes #2 through #7) is also included in *The Kingdom of God* blessing.
 - d. **D. A. Carson:** *Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount; p. 17*

Finally, we need to notice that two of the Beatitudes promise the same reward. To begin and end with the same expression is a stylistic device called an “inclusio.” This means that everything bracketed between the two can really be included under the one theme, in this case, the kingdom of heaven.

3. All these people are “*blessed*” when they meet Jesus, hear His message of “*the Gospel of the kingdom*”, repent of their sins and their self-righteousness, and enter the Kingdom of God by becoming a disciple of Christ.
4. Matthew’s Beatitudes point back to the Old Testament prophets, particularly **Isaiah**:
 - a. **Remember:** For Matthew, who writes to the Jews, Jesus is the New Moses and the Son of David who fulfills the law and the prophets.
 - b. Jesus is pointing back to Isaiah, and in particular, to the great prophecy of the Messiah’s Good News.
 - c. *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to grant to those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;
that they may be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.
They shall build up the ancient ruins;
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.* (Isa. 61:1-4)

- d. Luke clearly sets forth this truth:

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

*And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes
of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this
Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:16-21)*

- e. *Jesus was telling the crowds: "All that Isaiah 61 promised to you, I am here to fulfill. My kingdom will usher in the great blessings Isaiah foretold. I am here to redeem you, rebuild My Father's world and restore the blessing upon creation."*

5. It is quite possible that Jesus pronounced other Beatitudes in His sermons; He does elsewhere in the Gospels. But Matthew **selected** these 8 Beatitudes to show how they line up with Isaiah 61:1-4.

- a. The parallelism between the promises of Isaiah 61:1-11 and these 8 Beatitudes is amazing!
b. *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news...*

*And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel
of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. (Mt. 4:23)*

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

"...to bring good news to the poor."

- d. *Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. (Matthew 5:4)*

"...He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted..."

*to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to grant to those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit... (Isaiah 61:2-3a)*

- e. *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5)*

"...to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound."

- f. *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
(Matthew 5:6)*

*...that they may be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.
They shall build up the ancient ruins;*

*they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations. (Isaiah 61:3b-4)*

- g. *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. (Matthew 5:7)*

*Strangers shall stand and tend your flocks;
foreigners shall be your plowmen and vinedressers;
but you shall be called the priests of the Lord;
they shall speak of you as the ministers of our God;
you shall eat the wealth of the nations,
and in their glory you shall boast. (Isaiah 61:5-6)*

- h. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (Matthew 5:8)*

*Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion;
instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot;
therefore in their land they shall possess a double portion;
they shall have everlasting joy. (Isaiah 61:7)*

- i. *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (Matthew 5:9)*

*For I the Lord love justice;
I hate robbery and wrong;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
Their offspring shall be known among the nations,
and their descendants in the midst of the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge them,
that they are an offspring the Lord has blessed. (Isaiah 61:8-9)*

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

*I will greatly rejoice in the Lord;
my soul shall exult in my God,
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
For as the earth brings forth its sprouts,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up,
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to sprout up before all the nations. (Isaiah 61:10-11)*

- k. **Robert Guelich:** *The Sermon on the Mount (pp. 110)*

Matthew's redaction was basically christological, an attempt by aligning the Beatitudes with the Old Testament promise, especially with Isaiah 61, to demonstrate that God was at work in Jesus Messiah accomplishing His redemptive purposes for humankind. The Beatitudes are viewed by Matthew as Jesus' declaration, an announcement of congratulations, in the sense of Isaiah 61:1 rather than a demand for conduct.

6. And to those who suffer for righteousness' sake, the promise of Jesus Christ is this: *Righteousness has now invaded the world of men with power, for the Righteous One has come to establish His throne, build His Kingdom and gather His people from the four corners of the earth. The King has come!*

*The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shined.
You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.
For the yoke of his burden,
and the staff for his shoulder,
the rod of his oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.
For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. (Isaiah 9:2-7)*

*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,*

*the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
 And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.
 He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
 or decide disputes by what his ears hear,
 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
 and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
 and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
 and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
 Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,
 and faithfulness the belt of his loins.*

*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
 and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
 and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;
 and a little child shall lead them.
 The cow and the bear shall graze;
 their young shall lie down together;
 and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,
 and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.
 They shall not hurt or destroy
 in all my holy mountain;
 for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord
 as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:1-9)*

*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
 because the Lord has anointed me
 to bring good news to the poor;
 he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
 to proclaim liberty to the captives,
 and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
 and the day of vengeance of our God;
 to comfort all who mourn;
 to grant to those who mourn in Zion—
 to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,
 the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
 the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;
 that they may be called oaks of righteousness,
 the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.
 They shall build up the ancient ruins;
 they shall raise up the former devastations;
 they shall repair the ruined cities,
 the devastations of many generations. (Isaiah 61:1-4)*

7. Now that noble soul, who suffers for doing what is right, has joined the winning side!

- a. **First:** They hear the Gospel and see Jesus for who He is and themselves for who they are. They turn to Christ in repentance and faith and receive the *righteousness of God* for themselves:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." (Rom. 1:16-17)

- b. **Second:** Their human righteousness is now corrected by the Word of God and sanctified by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Hebrews 12:22-24)

- c. **Third:** Their commitment to righteousness is now strengthened all the more because of the power of the Spirit in their lives.

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (James 3:17-18)

- d. **Fourth:** They will soon be willing and ready to suffer and die for Jesus Christ and the righteousness of His kingdom!

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. (Matthew 5:11-12)

8. Here...last but not least...the noble of mind, the great of soul, and the courageous of heart enter the Kingdom of God.
9. Their suffering for righteousness is not in vain: *"The Blood of the Martyrs is the Seed of the Church."* (Cyprian)

CONCLUSION: In our life and times, Americans have fallen to low levels of living and loving...

1. They are preoccupied with five things: (1) their spoiled children, (2) their homes and possessions, (3) entertainment and sports, (4) the carnal pleasures of sex, and (5) the childish preoccupation with technology.
2. Americans are no longer a noble and righteous people.

3. Christ knows this. And He is calling us to something more noble: *Something larger than life, greater than ourselves, and lasting forever...the Kingdom of God.*
4. He is calling us to the joy of Christ's righteousness, to the cause of God's righteousness and to the Hope of the Spirit's righteousness for the whole world.
5. Only the noble of soul will indeed respond. As *William P. Merrill* has written:

Rise up, O Church of God! Have done with lesser things; Give heart and mind and soul and strength To serve the King of kings.

Rise up, O Church of God! His kingdom tarries long; Bring in the day of brotherhood And end the night of wrong.

Lift high the cross of Christ! Tread where His feet have trod; As foll'wers of the Son of Man, Rise up, O Church of God! (Hymn #293)

6. This last Beatitude is calling you away from those worldly, unrighteous and sinful things not worthy of human life and dignity.
7. *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 5:10)
8. What a grand conclusion to Christ's invitation for all to join Him – by repentance and faith – in His Kingdom!
9. The call to Christ...to the Kingdom...to Righteousness...
10. A call to join Jesus and the Witnesses of God in the greatest and most noble mission in all of human history!
11. **Reginald Heber** captured this call in a grand hymn we seldom sing: *"The Son of God Goes Forth to War."*

*The Son of God goes forth to war
A kingly crown to gain.
His blood-red banner streams afar;
Who follows in His train?
Who best can drink His cup of woe,
Triumphant over pain,
Who patient bears his cross below--
He follows in His train.*

*The martyr first whose eagle eye
Could pierce beyond the grave,
Who saw His Master in the sky
And called on Him to save.
Like Him, with pardon on His tongue,
In midst of mortal pain,*

*He prayed for them that did the wrong--
Who follows in his train?*

*A glorious band, the chosen few,
On whom the Spirit came,
Twelve valiant saints; their hope they knew
And mocked the cross and flame.
They met the tyrant's brandished steel,
The lion's gory mane;
They bowed their necks the death to feel--
Who follows in their train?*

*A noble army, men and boys,
The matron and the maid,
Around the Savior's throne rejoice,
In robes of light arrayed.
They climbed the steep ascent of heav'n
Thro' peril, toil, and pain.
O God, to us may grace be giv'n
To follow in their train! (Hymn #578)*