

Good morning. It's good to see you all here today. A couple of weeks ago, I got to do something that I very rarely get to do. Living in a house that is very busy, very chaotic, and has two little girls in it that they don't want to watch what I want to watch, they want to watch what they want to watch, which means that we want to watch what they want to watch as well. So I was home, I was by myself.

I had nothing to do. It was a Monday afternoon and I had the TV all to myself. Like the remote was in my hand. I could watch whatever I wanted to watch. And so I turned it on and I started doing whatever is the modern day equivalent of flipping through the channels.

We can't really do that anymore. You don't really flip. I started like going through our different streaming services to see what was on. And as I was scrolling through, I came across the movie, the sixth since maybe you've seen it before. I remember watching this movie all the way back in the theaters in the olden days of 1999, but I haven't watched it since.

It's one of those movies that when, you know, you know, like when you've seen it, you kind of get it. And to watch it again, it kind of robs you of that moment, that big reveal at the end. But I thought, you know, I want to kind of check it out. And so I watched it that afternoon and. And 25 years later, I still remember the thrill that it was to find out that.

Spoiler alert. If you haven't seen it, Bruce Willis character was dead the entire time. Like, I remember just being blown away by that, going, what in the world? How did I miss that? And for like days afterwards, replaying in my mind all of those clues that they flashed back to.

And it was like, how did I not see that? And. And like 25, over these last 25 years, this movie would just randomly pop up into my mind. Like, how did I miss it? The ending was a surprise.

It was not what I expected. And I have a feeling that today as we look at this text, that's the same feeling that Jesus, original audience in the Sermon on the Mount would have been left with. When Jesus gets to this passage that we are looking at today and he's kind of closing off this introduction to his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter five, six and seven, when he uses and says this last beatitude, I imagine that it caught them by surprise that it was not what they expected. Let's look at it together. Matthew chapter 5.

I want to read verses 10 through 12 this morning.

Jesus closes off the Beatitudes by saying this. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. He goes on, this is the only Beatitude with the commentary. He

goes on in verse 11, Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Now, this is not how I imagine the original audience expected this part of Jesus sermon to end. It's not how I expected the Beatitudes to end. Like you would think when you think through all of the different Beatitudes, you would think that people who are humble and who are gentle, who don't fight for their own way, who desire more of God in their life and less of themselves, and people who are pure in their actions and attitudes towards others. You would think that people who pursue peace in the midst of conflict, you would think that people who live with these kingdom values in them and flowing through them, that they would be the ones that people look at and go, man, I want to be more like that. I wish I had more of what that person had in my life, that they would be the people that everyone loves and wants to be around.

And so you would expect that Jesus would end the Beatitudes by saying this. Blessed are you. As you're living all of this out, blessed are you. Because people are going to say all kinds of good things about you. They are going to celebrate and praise you.

Because you are following me. That's not what he says. Instead, Jesus ends by saying, listen, this way of life that I am inviting you into this way of relating to the world around you, it's gonna cause some trouble. You're gonna find favor in the eyes of God, but you are going to find opposition in the face of others.

That's why he speaks so definitively in verse 11. Listen again to what Jesus says. Blessed are you. He turns it from blessed are those. Now he kind of turns and he's like looking at every single one of us who have chosen to follow Jesus.

And he says, blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Two things I don't want us to miss here. Number one, notice that Jesus says, when you are persecuted, not if you are persecuted. He's not saying, hey, just so you know, if you follow me There might be some people that are a little offended by that. And so you might come and experience, you know, some difficulties.

People might say unkind things about you. They might not treat you very well. Somebody says, I think he's implying that, be ready because this will happen and people will insult you. People will say all kinds of evil, true or false, against you because you are a follower of Jesus. People will ridicule and mock you.

Jesus is preparing us for this.

Number two, don't miss why Jesus says this is going to happen. He gives some qualifiers here. In verse 10, he says, Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness. Verse 11, he says, because of me. I don't want to be careful how I say this.

Here it goes. There are some Christians who claim persecution for Christ. And I want to be like, no, you were just acting like a jerk on social media and somebody called you on it. Like they're responding to your hostility with hostility. Like, you cannot claim persecution for Christ if there is nothing about Christ in your attitudes or actions.

You cannot claim the eighth beatitude if you are not living out number one through seven. And it's classic commentary from the 1940s. All right, so this is like before social media and before all of the easy ways that we kind of stick our foot in our mouths as Christians sometimes that we speak or post before saying, the great commentator and preacher Martyn Lloyd Jones says it like this. Matt Nussbaum brought this up in our Teach Team meeting. I just thought it was really good.

So I just want to quote him. Martyn Lloyd Jones. He says it does not say, blessed are those who are having a hard time in their Christian life because they are being difficult. It does not say, blessed are those who are being persecuted as Christians because they are seriously lacking in wisdom and really foolish and unwise. I love this guy.

Somebody said one time that Martyn Lloyd Jones, he. He preaches like he's looking for a fight.

He says we can bring endless suffering upon ourselves. We can create difficulties for ourselves which are quite unnecessary because we have some rather foolish notion or because in a spirit of self righteousness, we really do call it down on our own heads. And so Jesus is not saying, blessed are those who are self righteous. He's saying, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness. Jesus is talking about persecution that comes from following him.

Persecution that comes from being like Jesus in the way that we live, in the way that we love others. He is preparing us as his followers to be ready, because this will happen.

And when it does, Jesus wants Us to know that it is not a sign that we are doing something wrong. Especially his original audience that lived in this, in this shame and honor culture, they would have felt like if they were being persecuted, that somehow God was maybe punishing them and that they weren't following Jesus the way that they should. And Jesus is saying, no, it is not because you are doing something wrong. It is actually because you are doing something right. Persecution is a

feature of following Jesus, not a bug.

In fact, a couple of years after, Jesus gives this sermon on the mount, and I just pulled out my little tab and so instead of trying to find it, I'll just read it from the screen. Jesus says this in John, chapter 15, verse 20. Remember what I told you, A servant is not greater than his master. And he says, if they persecuted me, they will persecute you Also. A couple of decades later, the Apostle Paul, who knew a little something about being persecuted for following Jesus, he would write these words.

Anyone who wants to live all out for Christ is in for a lot of trouble. There's no way around it. The way of Jesus is so countercultural that when we live it out, it puts us in the crosshairs of the world around us. That was the story of Jesus, it was the story of Paul. It was the story of countless other Jesus followers throughout the centuries.

And it will be our story too.

Persecution is part of the blueprint for discipleship. It's part of the plan of how we become more like Jesus. And when we follow Jesus, yes, we embrace the joy of a relationship with him, but we are also saying, Jesus, I choose to embrace the hardship following you as well. So what does persecution look like? Well, around the world, we are in the month of praying for the persecuted church.

Many people around the world set aside the month of November to pray for followers of Jesus still today who are being persecuted. And around the world, followers of Jesus are being thrown in prison for their faith. They're losing their job, they're being rejected by their families, they're being threatened by local gangs, by local authorities. One of our own supported missionaries that was here with us on stage just last spring. Ajay Law was under house arrest in India for preaching Jesus and not standing down.

By the grace of God, he's been released and everything is being resolved or is being resolved. And I talked to him at a conference just last month, and he wanted me to pass on just his appreciation for our church, for praying for him during that time. Some people are even losing their lives because of their faith in Jesus.

And for those of us who live in the Western world, it is hard for us to imagine that this is still going on. But the truth is, not only is it still going on, it has increased to a level where it's happening now more today than ever before. Our brothers and sisters in Christ are literally laying down their lives to follow Jesus. They are willing to give it all up for him.

And that might be our story one day. But chances are that's not the

kind of persecution you and I are going to face.

Instead, for many of us, following Jesus in the face of opposition won't look like laying it all down at once. It's going to look like, like these little single moments of laying it down. It's gonna be lots of moments of just giving up a little bit at a time. You see, when it comes to persecution, we often imagine that if we had to do it, that we would be willing to give it all up for Jesus. That it's like we're willing to take this \$100 bill and say, lord Jesus, if you call me to, and if I'm face, will I be willing to lay it all down for you, Put it all on the table for you.

And there are some people that that is what Jesus is inviting them into. And that is going to be their story, to lay it all down at once. But for most of us, it's not going to be laying it all down at once. It's going to be laying it down a little bit at a time. It's going to be the willingness to lay down our life not a hundred dollar bill at a time, but one quarter at a time, little by little.

It's the willingness to lay down our life because we've been insulted for what we believe.

It's that price that we pay when we're slapped with that label of being a bigot, being closed minded, being backwards because we choose to follow Jesus.

It's being a part of that class that you're in where your professor doesn't believe the same things that you do, but he knows that you're a follower of Jesus maybe, and he mocks and ridicules you, maybe grades you more severely. It's your family members that look at you kind of funny because you've chosen to follow Jesus and they're like, what are you doing? When are you going to get over this whole religion thing?

It's your neighbor that when you meet him and the person finds out that you're a Christian, he looks at you and says, oh yeah, we're not going to get along true story. It happened to me one time with one of our neighbors. I didn't lay my life down for Jesus in that moment, but it was a quarter. It cost something. It hurt a little.

It's your coworkers going out to eat, not inviting you because they're afraid of what you might talk about or what they might talk about in front of you.

It's.

It's standing for Jesus and really trying to stand in this place of his truth and grace.

And the people that you thought were your brothers and sisters in

Christ who are desiring the same thing, they look at you and they say, man, you just take your faith way too seriously.

Or they look at you and they say, no, you are way too conservative in your faith or you are way too liberal in your faith. And the persecution comes from other followers of Jesus. It comes from within, and it hurts and you pay a little bit more.

I've preached sermons before where at the end it was either said to me or about me or posted online someplace that I was way too conservative and bigoted or that I was way too liberal and woke. I'm throwing in two for that one.

And I come out from that and. And it hurts because it's on my heart, just trying to be faithful to God and His Word.

I'm reminded of Jesus who says, yeah, they said the same thing about me. Religious people didn't like Jesus. They were the ones who killed him because they didn't know what to do with them.

So when it comes to persecution, we may not be called to lay it all down. We might be, but instead he might be inviting us to pour out our life for him, little by little by little. And as we do, as we give each one of those moments, as we pay that little price, maybe one quarter at a time, eventually we get to a life that has been completely poured out for Jesus, completely surrendered to Him. These small acts, they may seem minor at the time, especially compared to overt acts of persecution, but they still cost us something.

As we come to the end of this series on the Blessed Life according to Jesus, which has really been a series on the kind of people that God is forming us to be as we follow him, the question that I want to leave us with today is not, are you willing to die for Jesus? It's a good question.

Many of us won't necessarily come face to face with that. And so the question is not, are you willing to die for Jesus? The question is, are you willing to live for Him? Are you willing to sacrificially live for him, even if it requires those small acts of courage that may cost us a little bit of ourselves each time we give it. If I can be honest, I know in myself I want the answer to be yes.

Oh, so badly I want to be yes. I want it to be yes that I'm willing to lay it all down at once. And I want the answer to be yes. I will be willing to lay it down even one quarter at a time. But there are times and there are moments where I have the opportunity to stand for my faith, and I trip and I fall on my face.

I shy away.

I blend in.

I don't want to go against the grain. I keep quiet because of the pain of rejection. It just feels like more than I can give in the moment. And so my prayer this week has been, lord, help me to give it all for you. And if I can't give a quarter, help me to be able to give two dimes or a nickel.

Like help me to be able to give and be as bold for you as I can possibly be. And the blessing of this beatitude is the promise that when we are persecuted because of following Jesus, however big or however small, we are not losing anything. Instead we are gaining everything.

That every single quarter or dime or nickel, that every single moment we lay down our life for him, it will be worth it. Blessed are those who are persecuted, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And that is a reward that is far greater than anything we can take from this world and far greater than anything that this world can take from us.

It is the promise that if we belong and identify with Christ in His sufferings, we will identify in his glory that we belong to God's family, that we will experience this unshakable joy even in the midst of hardship. It is the blessing of a life that is marked by God's presence, filled with meaning and purpose. In those moments that we are ridiculed and rejected for Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes in and we experience him in a way that we cannot experience when we are living it safe on the sidelines. We can rejoice in those moments because they allow us to identify with Jesus in His suffering. We will know him more intimately than ever before.

And the promise of Scripture is that if we identify with Christ and His sufferings, then we will identify with Christ in His resurrection.

That is a reward that is worth living for. That is a reward that is worth dying for. And it is ours. When we seek the blessed life that Jesus invites us into the words of another great 90s movie. That's all I have to say about that.

Before we go, I want to wrap up our series on this blessed life.

Over the last eight weeks, we have been looking at what the blessed life looks like according to Jesus, not according to anyone else. And it's been very intentional this day. Oh, there we go. It's been very intentional that we are ending this series today. I'm not exaggerating when I say that for the last four years, I've been praying about what to preach this year in particular this fall, leading up to this Tuesday.

My goal for our time in the pulpit this year, especially in these last

eight weeks, has been to set our hearts and our minds on Jesus above anything or anyone else. And so we started with the study 13 weeks through the book of Colossians to just elevate our focus on Jesus and really look at what it means for us to live and follow Him. And then we talked about how to not be unoffendable in an offensive world. And. And we focused our hearts on the Psalms, the songbook of God, to just remind ourselves of his majesty and his glory, and that he is the one that we praise and that we worship and that we honor.

Over the last eight weeks, we've been talking about what does it mean and what does it look like to truly take on the kingdom ethic, to truly live the way that Jesus has called us to live. I said in week one of this series that there are a lot of people in our world that are trying to define the blessed life for us. They are promising that if we follow them, if we buy into their philosophies, if we support their policies, if we vote for them, then they will deliver us the blessed life that we desire. And in a couple of days, millions of Americans, and hopefully all of us who are able, are going to go to the polls and we are going to cast our vote. And I hope that you get out and vote on Tuesday.

But as your pastor, hear my heart. What I hope even more is that you follow Jesus closer than you follow your politician.

I hope that your politics will bow to the throne of Jesus rather than your faith in Jesus taking a backseat to your politics. Ultimately, our prayer is that you will approach this election knowing that you are first and foremost a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, and then you are a citizen in the United States of America, and that this order will guide the way that you interact with others over the next several days and maybe weeks as this plays out. And we'll direct you as you go to the polls. To exercise your right to vote. And to help with that, we have put together a little voter guide, and we want to share it with you this morning.

And before you get too excited or too riled up, let me just explain.

This isn't a guide to tell you who you should vote for. It's a guide to help us reflect on how we should vote and how we should approach this election as followers of Jesus. And I want to use it as our closing time of prayer to guide that closing time of prayer with us this morning. And so if you would just kind of make yourself comfortable, and I'm going to read each one of these statements and we'll have them up on the screen so you can follow along. And then I'll just say a short prayer after that.

And so, as you approach the election on Tuesday, let this guide you as a follower of Christ. Number one, I will commit to Jesus and his way over any political candidate or party.



Spend a few moments just praying for the ability to do that.

Number two, I will respect others as made in the image of God and will not demonize those I disagree with or who disagree with me.

Number three, I will look to Jesus rather than a politician or party to define the blessed life and provide it for me.

Number four, I will filter my political participation through my love for God and my love for my neighbor.

Number five, no matter the outcome of the election, I will trust God with the future.

Six, I will recognize that in our church and in my world, I can love people, they can love God, and we really can vote differently.

Number seven. And maybe the hardest of them all, for some of us, I will use social media to reflect Jesus first, my opinion second.

And so, Jesus, may we embrace these qualities. May we let them guide us as we interact, as we love others, as we love you, Lord, keep our attention focused on the main thing.

And as we live for you and give ourselves to you, there are times where it is going to cost us something. Help us remember that what we gain is even more beautiful. What we gain is something that this world can never take from us. So comfort us with that and encourage us to live boldly for you, Jesus.

Amen this morning, if you're able to say yes and amen to those if you'd like, on your way out. Today, we've made these little voter guides available. They look like this. They'll be on some tables on your way out. Feel free.

Pick up one, pick up a couple, pick up five, hand them out to some people, pray through it over these next couple of days.

Let us, as we leave this place this morning, let us go truly desiring to be known as followers of Jesus above anything else identifying with him. And again, as was mentioned earlier, Beth said, Tomorrow night, 6:30pM we're going to gather in here for a little time of worship and prayer. We'd love to see you there. Won't you stand with me? And we're going to close off with one more song.