

Ten Reasons to Rejoice When Persecuted

Luke 6:22-23

We are wrapping up our study of just the beatitudes. As we go through our exposition of the gospel of Luke, the beatitudes here in Luke's gospel, Luke 6:20-23, is really the introduction of the entire Sermon on the Mount. And today we're going to continue what we began last time, a couple of weeks ago, in Luke 6:22-23, "blessed are the despised."

Let's, let's begin as we've been doing by reading those beatitudes again together. Starting in verse 20, "'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward in heaven is great; for so their fathers did to the prophets."

I want to say just a few words about those beatitudes, just by way of summary and review as we get back in to the flow. According to Jesus' sure and certain promise, for those who count themselves to be among the poor. That is, destitute beggars on the earth. Having cut their cord with the world and separated it from all earthly ambition. Blessed are they, for theirs', and theirs' alone, we're into the text there, theirs' is the kingdom of God."

It's by this mindset of poverty that, for the poor, their spiritual senses have really been awakened. And Christian affections are aroused within them. The poor now feel this gnawing sense of spiritual hunger which they know can only be satisfied in God. The poor now possess an awareness within them, an acute sensitivity to sin. And that causes them to weep and sorrow, even shedding tears.

These new affections within them, the hunger, the weeping, evidences of regeneration. These are proof positive of what's called the new birth. The blessed poor, they have become partakers of new life, which makes them sharers in the heart of God. And it unites them to the family of God. All of them

alike, all the family, all the poor, they love what God loves. They hate what God hates. Blessed are they.

For their spiritual hunger will be satisfied in God one day. They sorrow over sin, whether it's their own sin or the sin that they see in the others around them. That sorrow is going to come to an end. They are removed, sin is judged. It'll come to an end with such finality that all their crying will be forgotten. It will give way to rapturous delight, as they literally laugh out loud in the Lord.

But, until that time, we're reminded that until that day when God brings these blessed poor to the end of their earthly sojourn. He brings an end to all their hungering and sorrowing and weeping over sin. Life is going to be a continual experience of hungering for God and longing to be satisfied. Life is going to now be a continual experience of sorrowing over sin. Whether it's a sin, as we said the self, or the sin that beguile and enslave and destroy other people around us.

And then they added to the travail of this life as new creatures in Christ, added to that is what we find in verses 22-23. The rejection, opposition, sometimes full on persecution that we experience from the Christ rejecting world. And that's what we looked at last time in verses 22-23. As we see there in verse 22 the persecution begins with the heart.

The heart of unbelievers with very negative internal attitudes. "Blessed are you when people hate you." And we're reminded as we think about that word hatred, over in Matthew 5:21 and 22, Jesus described that heart attitude of hatred as really tantamount to murder. Because that's where murder begins, it begins in the heart. It begins with hatred, with despising another person.

If you've been a Christian for any length of time, if you've been outspoken at all in your faith, you've been on the receiving end of this hatred. There is this murder in the heart hatred for the sake of righteousness, as you pursue righteousness in Christ. The hatred can be subtle at first, you may not even immediately recognize it as such but that hidden hatred eventually becomes manifest in outward behavior.

The exclusion, reviling, spurning, as it says here, but at first it's a bit mysterious to us. We puzzle over "Hey did I say something wrong? Hey was I unkind in some way?" We question ourselves because that's what we do as Christians. We look at our lives and see if there's any way we need to repent, any forgiveness we need to seek. Any way that we've been out of line because we know as Christians we are not perfect.

We know as Christians we are struggling with sin and need to overcome that. So we realize it could be us, but after puzzling through that we realize, you know, I think it actually has more to do with the Christ they see in me. I think it actually has to do with the fact that I am pursuing righteousness and they are not.

So then exclusion comes, the reviling, the spurning. As we said last time to be excluded has to do with being pushed out of social circles. Okay, there's a formal use of the word in a Jewish context that refers to formal excommunication from the Synagogue, which is really to be cut off from the entire community. Same idea in the Gentile setting only less formal,

but it refers to being marginalized, ostracized, left out, pushed away.

Among those who hate the Son of man, that is all unregenerate people, there comes a point when you're no longer welcome in their company. Fundamentally they need Christ. So it stands to reason that they're going to hate those who remind them of Christ. That's you. They're going to hate those who represent Christ. John 15 says if they hated me, Jesus said, they'll hate you too.

The social exclusion then escalates to verbal persecution. Reviling, slandering, gossiping about you, disparaging you to others. This is a verbal abuse, a verbal scorn, it may be mild and under the breath. It's quieted and hushed when you walk into the room. Or it could become more severe, more acerbic, maybe vitriolic.

Finally the verbal reviling escalates to even yet another level as unbelievers they really come together and render a summary judgment against the name by which you are identified. The name it says here, singular in the text, the

name by which you are known and identified they spurn that name as evil. They spew forth their anger in a way like this, "oh that's one of the stupid Christians."

You can almost hear the scorn and revulsion come out as they speak the name Christian. The word spurn, as we said last time, is the same word used for exorcism. That is to say they cast that name out from among them, rejecting it summarily. So notice the flow here as it goes from bad to worse right? It starts with an internal hatred, but then it moves outward, expressed in external rejection and persecution. And really this hatred is, as Christ says, tantamount to murder.

First, as we see here it's social murder, exclusion. Then it's verbal murder, a reviling. And finally it's kind of a summery almost genocidal murder. They come to wish that you and all your kind were dead. That's just a summary of what we covered last time.

And I'd like us to revisit, consider once again, the occasion by which or for which the persecution comes upon us. Again I covered this briefly last time, but notice at the

end of verse 22, the persecution for which we're counted blessed it's not our own bad behavior. It's not our own stupidity. It's not our own mistakes or dumb actions. It's not our own sin.

None of that earns us this beatitude of blessed. What it says there, persecution for which we're counted blessed, is on account of the Son of man. On account of him. When we live like him. When we pursue fidelity to his Word. When we try to walk as he walked. When we follow his example. When we love him, when we worship him, persecution is going to come. Count on it.

We don't go looking for persecution, we don't have to. It just comes to us. All because of him. The more we resemble the Son of man, the more we think like him, the more we speak like him, behave like him, walk as he walked, the more we're going to experience the rejection of the world. Again that's just what Jesus told us, John 15:18-20 he said "If they hated me, they will hate you too." That is not a maybe, that is a will, it's indicative. If they persecuted me they're going to do the same to you.

But, and this is what we need to see beloved. Fear not. Do not fear what they say. Do not fear their persecution. Do not fear their hatred. Because when those kinds of persecution come to you on account of the Son of man, as it says here "Blessed are you." To fear in the face of that pronouncement of our Lord. That ascription of blessedness, listen that's, that's not good. It's almost spurning his gift, his pronouncement. And this is where we left off last time. We were just broaching the joyful spirit of verse 23 where Jesus tells his poor, hungry, weeping, persecuted disciples, look, rejoice in that day, leap for joy.

That is to say when that day comes, when you are hated and excluded and reviled and spurned as evil, and it will come, you're to rejoice and leap for joy when that day comes. Again as we said last time, rejoice, leap for joy, those two verbs, those are commands. They're not recommendations. They're not suggestions. Those are actually aorist imperatives, very very strong commands. Which are commanding our obedience with a sense of urgency.

You might think of it this way, rejoice immediately when you face persecution. Jump right up where you are and leap for joy, don't hesitate for a second. You might say it this way oppositely, do not bemoan your station if you are persecuted. Don't put on the gloomy face, moping about in dread agony acting like some kind of potential martyr all the time. "Oh well, you know they, they said I was one of those dumb Christians." Trying to evoke sympathy or something like that. Don't do that.

Don't even feel sad. When you're despised by the world don't groan and say, "Woe is me." That's completely the wrong attitude, the wrong response to persecution, rather rejoice. Leap for joy, why? Because you've been counted worthy to suffer for the sake of Christ. Think about that. He suffered for you.

To enter into that suffering, isn't that a blessing? Now beloved I realize that's not a natural response. It's not the first impulse of our flesh to skip around gleefully when people despise us and curse the day we were born. That doesn't feel

good to receive that kind of persecution. It's not natural to respond that way, but that is precisely the point here.

This is not a natural response; this is a supernatural response. This is a spiritually minded response. Responding to persecution like this, that is rejoicing in obedience to Christ's command. That is a response that can only be generated by the Holy Spirit. Look, he's the power at work within those who are born again. And it's only by the Holy Spirit that one is regenerated in the first place to become the poor and the hungry and the weeping, right?

So if you're numbered among those when persecution comes then God is also going to give you the grace to rejoice as Christ has commanded you to do in the midst of persecution. Which will also, your rejoicing will come by the power of the Holy Spirit. Now with that in mind knowing our natural proclivity to respond poorly to persecution. Knowing that persecution is coming for the sake of Christ, what I'd like to do this morning is to give you some encouragement to rejoice when persecuted.

So let's make a list okay? You'll see in your bulletin I've given you a head start, okay, ten reasons to rejoice when persecuted. Now, I've already gotten the jokes alright, ten points. With ten reasons to cover that gives us about 3-4 minutes for each one. So let's, best we get started right away waste no time.

We've noted here in verse 23 that Christ is commanding us to rejoice. And then he follows it up with two reasons to rejoice. But there's more to see in verse 22 that I'd like to call your attention to. So we're going to start there with the first reason to rejoice when persecuted. And you just fill these in in your outline as you go along. You should have written there "Rejoice because" and then you're going to fill in the blank.

Okay, so first point, rejoice because you are the blessed of Christ. Rejoice because you are the blessed of Christ. Remember what we said about the word blessed way back when. The word makarios in the Greek means "to be blessed," "to be blessed." "To be considered or counted as favored." In fact there's a sense in which those who are the blessed, the

makarios, they are even envied by others for being so well favored. So well positioned, so favorably situated. That's what it means to be blessed, to be makarios. Look at verse 22 and then we're going to look at verse 26.

"Blessed are you," in verse 22, "when people hate you, when they exclude you, revile you, spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of man." And then look at the opposite at verse 26, "woe to you when all people speak well of you." That should actually be, beloved, a warning to you. If everybody likes you in your life that should cause you to pause. To take a careful look at your life. Take a careful look at your testimony. Are you really liked by everybody?

"Woe to you when all people speak well of you for so their fathers did to the false prophets." Let me ask you a very basic, primary, fundamental question. Those two verses there, verses 22 and 26, do you believe that? Do you believe that? Because if you do, if you believe those verses, you know what, that's remarkable. Don't take it for granted. Because to the naturally, carnally, minded man it is utterly counterintuitive to believe what Jesus says here. Because this

is completely opposite of what the rest of the world believes. So, if you truly believe those verses you're in. You're in!

You belong to him. Listen all those beatitudes they require us to deal with this fundamental issue of faith. Do I believe Jesus, do I trust him. Do I live this way or not? These verses force us to reckon with our hearts. To reckon with our belief system, our worldview, what is, who it is, that we are going to trust. Do we trust the words, the testimony, the worldview of Jesus Christ, or do we distrust him on this point or that point. That's really the question.

If you believe him on this point, on all these points, in everything he said, then you are counted among the blessed. Yes, you'll draw fire from the world. Yes, you will incur their wrath, you'll be salt in their wound, the provocation of their guilty souls. It's going to result in persecution. They will hate, exclude, revile, spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man. But, when that happens, let me remind you beloved that you have been counted among the poor.

Among those who truly hunger for God and God alone. Those who weep over sin. That means you are also counted among the blessed of Christ, you belong to him. You believe in him and that is remarkable, that means you possess saving faith. Given to you by God, you're counted righteous in Christ. This is proof positive evidence you've been born again. That's a great reason to rejoice, we could preach a whole sermon on that. Amen? But I'm going to resist the temptation and I'm going to keep on moving.

That brings us immediately to a second reason to rejoice when persecuted. Rejoice, number two, because you are resembling Christ. Rejoice because you are resembling Christ. We're the poor, verse 20, which means we are in present possession of the kingdom of God. We can also say that the kingdom of God has a significant claim on us too, right?

The kingdom of ours is ours, which means we belong to the kingdom, Christ is our king. And that means we are Christ's subjects. Paul said in Colossians 1:13 that we are those who have been delivered "from the domain of darkness and transferred

[out of that and] into the kingdom of [God's] beloved Son. So in possession of the kingdom, you know what, the kingdom and its king is also in possession of us. That's a blessing. Our king, the Lord Jesus Christ, he is no ordinary earthly king.

Colossians 2:9-10 tells us that, "In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority." In other words, as subjects of Christ's kingdom, unlike any king in any part of the world anywhere that there is a king, anybody who is in charge, this is different. For this king, we're united with this king, we're spiritually one with him. There's a spiritual mystery here.

We're united with him and he pours into us the very fullness of the deity, he wants us to be like him. This is rich with eternal glory. Paul sums that up with the statement in Colossians 1:27, "Christ in you, the hope of glory," a great mystery. Christ our king is intent on making all of his subjects conform to his perfect image. Which, as Colossians 2:9 tells us, "is the fullness of deity bodily."

What is this? He is filling us with the very fullness of deity. Which dwells perfectly in him. And he intends to perfect that image in us. Yes we, there is still a creator-creature distinction. Yes he is God, we are not we are humans. We're finite, he is infinite. But there is some way in which we are becoming filled with the very fullness of God.

Ephesians 4:13, we are maturing "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." That's incredible, how does that happen? By the Holy Spirit whom Christ sent to live in us, 2 Corinthians 1:22 says that "he has also put his seal on us and given His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee." That Holy Spirit from the very beginning of Scripture in Genesis 1 that Spirit is moving. That Spirit is active, energetic, powerful.

He does not remain stagnant. The Holy Spirit does not come in to us and then go to sleep. He's not dormant, he does not leave us unchanged. He is working within us all the time both to will and to do according to his good pleasure. His energy and power is at work within us to change us, to conform us to the image of Christ. We see, like in Galatians 5:22-23, that

the fruit of the Spirit, that is, when the Spirit is there, there is fruit produced.

You cannot have a Christian with no fruit. When the Spirit is there and present there is a fruit growing and it is this, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control. Do you know what those qualities are? Not a perfect, picture of perfect virtue, but you know what they are essentially? They're really a picture of the perfections of Jesus Christ. That's what Galatians 5:22 is, Christ.

The fruit of the Spirit, the effectual nature of his presence and his power is to make us look like that. To look like Jesus Christ, who is always loving, always joyful, always peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, self controlled. And that is what the Holy Spirit produces in us. The life, the character, the virtue of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So, when you're persecuted on account of Christ rejoice! Because they're seeing something of him in you. Which they hate, but they're seeing something of him in you. Rejoice

because you're resembling Christ to such a degree that the world hates you.

Again this rejoicing and leaping for joy, this is not self produced. This is a spirit wrought response, causing us to rejoice as Christ did also in the face of violent hostility and persecution. Hebrews 12:2 says, "For the joy set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame." And on it goes. The Holy Spirit that causes us to resemble Christ, brings the world's hatred and persecution upon us all for his name's sake. But by that same Spirit Christ intends to produce that same joy in us as well. That's the second reason to rejoice because we're resembling Christ.

Okay, rejoice because we are counted among the blessed by faith. Rejoice because we more closely resemble Jesus Christ. The more you resemble Jesus Christ the more you're going to draw enemy fire. Here's a third reason, verse 22, we can rejoice, rejoice because you're condemned by Christ's enemies. Rejoice, number three, because you are condemned by Christ's enemies. Now this may be counter intuitive but here's how the math goes. I checked with some math scholars and here's

what they tell me. A negative times a negative equals a positive. You're like "Okay great, but what does that have to do with the text?"

Well, when a negative judgment is rendered by a negative source we may take that as positive judgment right? Okay, that's thin I know, thin. The logic sounds counter intuitive but it is true. Beloved we're known not, not just by the friends we keep, we're also known by the enemies who oppose us.

Turn over to Matthew 12 for a moment, Matthew chapter 12. And again we need to make these cross references very very quick, so get over there as soon as you can, we'll take a look at that together. Matthew 12:22. Matthew 12:22, we read about Jesus delivering a poor man from demon oppression and then there's a judgment that follows from the Pharisees which is absolutely ridiculous and astounding.

Look at Matthew 12:22, it says then "a demon oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him." This is a picture of pathos here, pity, it's terrible, it's pathetic. It says there in verse 22 that Jesus healed him so the man spoke and

saw. And all the people were amazed, rightly so, and they said "can this be the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it they said it is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." Ludicrous. "Knowing their thoughts [verse 25] Jesus said to them every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste. No city or house divided against itself will stand. If Satan casts out Satan he's divided against himself, how then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, well then whom do your, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. If it is by the Spirit of God [and it is] that I cast out demons then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

"None of that earns us this beatitude of blessed. What it says there, persecution for which we're counted blessed, is on account of the Son of man."

We don't have time to go in to how masterfully Jesus demonstrated the ridiculous nature of the Pharisees' criticism and judgment. But, notice here in this section what else we learn about Jesus' detractors. What does the Pharisees judgment tell us not about Jesus but about the Pharisees. What is the

true nature and source of their opposition to Jesus' ministry. Jesus does not leave us guessing on this point. Look at verse 33. "Either make the tree good and its fruit good or make the tree bad and its fruit bad for the tree is known by its fruit." Stop there for just a second. I mean what came out of the Pharisee in the face of Jesus healing and setting someone free?

Opening the man's mouth, opening his eyes, sending the demon away, that is a good thing. They judged it as coming from Satan, bad fruit from a bad tree. Look at verse 34, "You brood of vipers. How can you speak good when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."

Look we are condemned and persecuted by those who by nature are evil. Their judgment should never cause us to waver. Never cause us to doubt. Their judgment, their words should never cause us to become unsettled, unstable, worried, anxious. Rather their distorted perverted sense of justice and righteousness all their judgment should hearten us. They are

getting it all wrong. And their judgment says something about us. Persecution for our allegiance to Christ. Persecution for our pursuit of Christ. That should assure us because of their ill judgment their ill favor we are on the right track.

Look back at Luke 6:22, "When evil men spurn your name as evil on the account of the son of man." This is an affirmation the true nature of our allegiance is becoming apparent to the enemy, to a wicked world. We are smoking them out. We belong to the Son of man. We stand for him. Our character is known by our friends. But even more poignantly by our enemies as well. By their hostility by their opposition.

Ok so that is three reasons. Let's get to a fourth reason to rejoice in the face of hostility and persecution. Rejoice, number four, because you are on the right side of history. Rejoice because you are on the right side of history from a worldly perspective. Having a joyful reaction to public ostracizing would be, seem to be proof positive to others of our insanity, right? To rejoice when people hate you, that seems to be what would make you certifiably crazy because it is so completely opposite of how quote, unquote, "normal" people would

be expecting to be reacting in the same situation. No one wants to be hated, rejected, ostracized. In fact, we don't like it that much either.

"Rejoice because you are drawing close to Christ. "

Travis Allen

For most, most of the world verse 26, they seek the favor of all people. They are people pleasers by nature. They are yes men. They rejoice when other people speak well of them. It is not natural to rejoice when people hate you. That said we can see examples. Even worldly human examples in the history of the unbelieving world. That even among them, they understand that there are some causes worth being hated for.

Just our recent history in our country reminds us of those who stood firm on the right issue in the judgment of time but who were hate and mistreated for it in their own time. You think of the abolition of slavery. Think about the protection of children who were suffering hard and harsh conditions of

labor during the industrial revolution especially in the cities. All of this was done to put in fair labor laws.

Or in our own day, the abolition of the crime of abortion. Standing against murdering children in the womb. All those, standing firm on all those issues, they are not always popular positions to take. Some have even suffered mistreatment or injury from their contemporaries for taking such stands in their own time. But time has vindicated their moral judgment the moral courage of those people is now recognized. We make movies about them. Write books about them. Tell stories, uphold them as models. Even though in their own day they were despised. That is just the unbelieving world.

Don't look for that kind of appreciation from the world for standing for the cause of Christ. To be hated by them for the cause of Christ, to stand firm on His side. To be mistreated on the account of the son of man, the worth of that cause is not going to be known in this time. Except by those that have been

born again. Except by those who are holy. Except by those who see the world now through heavenly eyes.

That is something that the unregenerate world is utterly unable to do and frankly at times it is something we even struggle to do, don't we? Listen, folks this is why eschatology matters. The doctrine of last things, we need to go to the conclusion of the story. Over and over and over again, to remind ourselves how this all ends.

In the end the whole world is going to see the truth. Some to eternal rejoicing, some though to eternal lamenting. Turn over to Matthew 25:31, Matthew 25:31, the end of Matthew's gospel here. Matthew 25:31, look what happens at this final moment when the great shepherd of the sheep when he separates the sheep from the goats. Matthew 25:31 and following says this, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory."

Okay, just stopping there, boy that is going to be quite a day isn't it? "When the Son of Man comes in his glory." Wow, this church and all faithful churches are going to be, we're going to shout out the entire world with our joy. We're going

to sing, we're going to rejoice. Think about the rest of the world. "When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him. Then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He'll place the sheep on his right but the goats on his left. And then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come you who are blessed by my Father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"

Then Jesus goes on to describe the character of those who are in that kingdom, now look at verse 41. "He will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me you cursed. Into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" Look at verse 46 as well. These, those who are the cursed, those on his left, the goats, "These [verse 46] will go away into eternal punishment. But the righteous into eternal life."

Listen folks, it's those who enter eternal life who are on the right side of history. I hear a lot of talk of these, about these days, don't you, hey you want to be on the right side of

history on this issue. Better get on board, better vote the right way. Better get the right candidate, vote for the right legislation. Take this stance, sign this petition. Because you want to be on the right side of history. Look, none of that matters on this day. What matters is are you oriented rightly to the Son of Man.

To those who enter into eternal punishment no matter social positions and causes they supported or opposed in this life. No matter who or what they identified with. If they enter into eternal punishment we can say without fear of contradiction, "Well, they were on the wrong side of history." Sobering thought.

So we rejoice in persecution because it demonstrates we're the blessed of Christ, we're resembling Christ, we're therefore condemned by the enemies of Christ, which means we're favorably situated. Standing with Christ on the right side of history. As it says there in Matthew 25:34 then the king is going to say to us, those on his right come, "Come, come you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you

from the foundation of the world." That's reason for rejoicing is it not?

Here's a fifth reason, fifth reason to rejoice, number five. Rejoice because you are drawing close to Christ. Rejoice because you are drawing close to Christ. Here's where we've come, going back to Luke 6:23, here's where we come to verse 23. And the fact that Christ commands us to rejoice in the face of persecution. We're hated and despised. Where excluded, rejected, spurned in this world, and our Lord commands us here in verse 23, "Rejoice in that day, leap for joy." Look, when we feel the heat of persecution. When we feel the burning shame of social scorn and exclusion. When we feel that sting coming at us of verbal attacks, the pain of being pushed away, even from former friends and family, blood relations. We look to our Lord's command to rejoice and we cry out, honestly, "How long oh Lord, how long? How can I rejoice in this pain, can you help me to rejoice in this pain?"

We hear that echoed over and over throughout the Psalms. As psalmists are persecuted by God's enemies, and they cry out drawing near to him. Drawing close to God for help, for

succor in their time of need. Many places we could turn, let's just look to one of them in Psalm 13, Psalm 13. If you'll just hold your place real quick in Luke 6 and go to Psalm 13. This is a Psalm of David, who was often chased and harried by enemies. Psalm 13 verse 1, "How long oh Lord? Will you forget me forever?"

Now again he's not calling God's omniscience into question here, he's just, it's just from his perspective he feels set aside. "How long oh Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Consider, answer me oh Lord my God? Light up my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death. Lest my enemies say, 'I've prevailed over him.' Lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken."

Listen, in the midst of persecution we're pushed down to our knees. Those enemies out there, they are strong make no mistake. And if true difficult even violent persecution comes against us, if it's government persecution, there's some of us in this room who've served with that government. We know how

they're trained. We can't stand against that, we're considered as sheep to be slaughters. We're not going to run to our bunkers and get our guns and fight against the government. No, no.

We're going to drop to our knees, finding no strength in ourselves, but we're going to look upward to God as David did. We're going to look up to him, cry out to him, "Help us, rescue us, save us." Look how he answers in verses 5-6, "But I have trusted in your steadfast love. My heart shall rejoice in your salvation."

That's a summary statement, "your salvation," we now know what David didn't see clearly, we know that salvation is in justification by faith in Jesus Christ through the cross. He just called it "your salvation." But he's looking to Christ here. He's looking to his own greater Son. "I trust in your steadfast love, my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because he's dealt bountifully with me."

Look when we cry out to God in the face of persecution. When our enemies multiply, our foes attack in

overwhelming numbers, God turns our eyes toward Jesus Christ. To see his salvation, to rejoice that we share in Christ's sufferings, we are drawn ever closer to him. That's Paul's view of it anyway. Turn over to the New Testament real quick in Philippians, Philippians chapter 3 and verse 10. Philippians 3:10 if you can get there quickly.

Paul is recounting there the things that give him favor in this world. Especially that which commended him as something or someone in a Jewish context. And there in verses 5 & 6, Philippians 3, he recites his credentials "circumcised the eighth day, of the people of Israel tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the Law a Pharisee, zeal I was a persecutor of the Church, as to righteousness under the law externally I was blameless."

He was eager, though, to trade all of that for the righteousness of Christ. That he might know Christ, and particularly through sharing in his sufferings. Look at Philippians 3:7. He says there, Philippians 3:7, "Whatever gain I had I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing

Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, count them but rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ to be found in him. Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the Law but that which comes through faith in Christ. The righteousness of God that depends on faith. That I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share in his sufferings. Becoming like him in his death if by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."

Listen beloved when we share in the sufferings of Christ, we cry out to God who turns our eyes of faith to our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ suffered for us at the hands of cruel, relentless tormentors and persecutors. And we enter, when we enter into that suffering, even in the minutest degree, we feel some of the same persecutions and we're drawn closer to him in our persecution. Which is a reason to rejoice, again, when we're persecuted by the unbelieving world.

Here's a sixth reason to rejoice, number six, rejoice because you're growing in Christ likeness. Rejoice because you're growing in Christ likeness. Turn back to Luke 6, I think, we have already made the point that persecution on

account of the Son of Man means we are resembling Christ in some measure. And as we draw closer to Christ, in and through that persecution, the more intimate our exposure to him, the more it is that we grow in Christ likeness.

The more that results, though, in being despised and rejected by the world. We preach Christ crucified, 1 Corinthians 1:23, a stumbling block to Jews, it's folly to the Gentiles. If we're proclaiming the gospel, living out the implications of the gospel, with unmistakable clarity in our lives, then the world is going to count our message and us as absolutely useless.

1 Corinthians 1:24 though, "To those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God." Through our proclamation through our transformed living as we grow in Christ likeness we are 2 Corinthians 2:15 and 16, "We are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing." Same aroma, two different ways of taking that aroma.

To the one we are a fragrance of death to death so they hate us and persecute us. To the other we are a fragrance from life to life. Being hated, rejected, persecuted for the sake of righteousness on account of the Son of Man, it casts us before Christ. We pray to him for comfort and help which we receive with his eager abundance. The closer we come to him the more we're like him. The more we are like him the more we become persecuted. The more we draw near to him, the more, and it just continues in the same process to become like the one we worship.

We rejoice at the increase of Christ likeness in our lives. With the aroma of Christ in this world, with the fragrance of death to those who are perishing we are a reminder of their condemnation and their guilt before God. We're a reminder of their accountability and future judgment and we do become weary in the opposition don't we.

As we become weary we look to the seventh reason to rejoice. Number seven, rejoice because you are longing for heaven. You're longing for heaven. The weariness and the opposition and the persecution causes us to long for

heaven. Listen there is nothing like persecution to turn our hearts away from this world.

To make us long for heaven and our eternal reward. Here's where I'd like you to look at verse 23 again Luke 6, "Rejoice on that day and leap for joy [Jesus says] for behold [behold] your reward in heaven is great." The word "behold" there is meant to grab our attention. To arrest our attention, snap us into the right perspective.

It's as if here, our Lord, like a loving but firm parent, he takes a hold of our little heads. And he turns our little eyes away from the world and all of its enmity. Where we're so anxious, where we're so troubled, and he swivels our heads around so our eyes can focus upward, so we can look heavenward. Which is where our great eternal reward is located.

As John says, "The world is passing away along with its desires." And we might add along with its wrath, along with its

rebellion. Along with its iniquity, its hubris, its persecutions, we don't need to worry about any of that. Let the dead bury their own dead right?

1 John 2:17, "Whoever does the will of God abides forever." Jesus is not giving us in Luke 6:23 a method to cope here. That's not, this is not a coping mechanism. He's giving us a perspective here that is going to cause us to be utterly unshakable. He commands us to fix our eyes on heaven. He commands us to think God-centered eternal thoughts. Because that's what shapes our perspective and sets our expectations.

Same thing we find Paul saying, Colossians 3:1-4, "Since then you have been raised up with Christ seek the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth, for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. So when Christ, who is your life, when He appears you also will appear with him in glory."

Listen, take all the wrath of the ungodly, the human the demonic alike, and combine them throughout all history and all

time. Our heavenly reward is more certain and more fixed and more bounded and anchored than any of those ungodly are. When God visits the wicked they're like smoke that's driven away, Psalm 68:2. David writes in Psalm 37, he says "I have seen a wicked worthless man spreading himself out like a green laurel tree. But he passed away and behold he was no more, though I sought him he could not be found. Mark the blameless, behold the upright, for there is a future for the man of peace."

Look, the promise of Christ is certain and fixed because it's grounded in the unchanging character of God. If there exists a reward in heaven for us, and there is, as Christ has said. There is indeed such a reward. His promise assures us not only of the reward, but that we're one day going to be there to behold that reward, to claim it and enjoy it forever.

1 Peter 1, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has caused us to be born again to a living hope, to an inheritance that's imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away." Reserved where? In heaven for you. What is that reward? What is that inheritance? It's God. It's the God who

saved us. And if we have him don't we have everything else besides.

Again that's the benefit of persecution, it just peels away our affections from this world. It centers them where they should be on Christ and his kingdom. The reward of his kingdom which is the eternal living God. God is the reward of the righteous. 1 Peter 3, "Christ died to bring us to God."

So, let us not be weary of well doing. For in due season we shall reap if we fade not. For those whose eyes are heavenward. For those whose affections are centered on God. We have this promise from Hebrews 6:19, "A sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters in to the inner place behind the curtain where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf." What is the inner place? What is the holy of holies? God, God. In every high and stormy gale my anchor holds within that veil.

That brings us to an eighth reason we rejoice in the face of persecution. Number eight, rejoice because you are growing in holy boldness. Rejoice because you are growing in holy

boldness. Go ahead and turn over to Acts chapter 2, we're just going to run through this very quickly, track this in Acts 2.

The Apostles, they really turned Jerusalem upside down with their testimony about the risen Christ. Do you know what happened first before they started turning Jerusalem upside down with their testimony about the risen Christ? Oh yeah, Pentecost. Oh yeah, the Holy Spirit strengthened them, entered into them. They were men of holy boldness, absolutely fearless in their proclamation.

Peter said in Acts 2:36, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ [get this] this Jesus whom you crucified." That's bold. Again in Acts 3:14-15, "You denied the holy and righteous one and asked for a murderer to be granted to you and you killed the author of life, who God raised from the dead, to this we are witnesses."

Oh yeah, we were there, we saw it all, we were witnesses. You can't get away from this, we're not going to keep quiet about it. Again Acts 4, the priests, the temple

guard, Sadducees, they'd finally had enough of all this preaching, of all this condemnation on them. "Hey, you're judging us Peter. Judge not lest you be judged. Better keep my mouth shut."

All this questioning, the Apostles were not intimidated at all. They looked directly into the eyes of the persecutors, those who took them into custody and they said this: "This Jesus, whom you crucified, this Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone and there is salvation in no other name [in no one else]."

They were released, they kept on preaching. It says in Acts 5:17 that this time the high priest rose up and all who were with him filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles, put them in the public prison, Christ sent an angel to release them and it says in verse 21, "They entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach." Silence us will yah, here we go! Officers went and arrested the Apostles again, brought them to the high priest who scolded them, no, no, no, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name and yet you have filled

your Jerusalem with your teaching. And you intend to bring this man's blood on us."

Didn't they say, let his blood be on us and our children forever? Didn't they say it, wasn't that their words? Peter let them off the hook? No, not for a minute. Look at Acts 5:30, "The God of our Fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree." God exalted him at his right hand as leader and savior to give repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of sins, incredible boldness. Moral courage here because they believe the Gospel, and that Gospel is anchor for their hope and bold courage.

High priest, Sanhedrin, absolutely perplexed, verse 40 they called the Apostles in, had them beaten, charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus any longer, let them go. What did they do? Did they heed the warning? No. They left the presence of the council, verse 41, "Rejoicing they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name."

Every day in the temple, from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching the Christ, that Christ is Jesus. Listen, like the Apostles, they're just men of like nature with us. They're nothing, I mean physically humanly speaking, they're nothing, they're just us. But they were filled with the Spirit.

Deeper there, our assurance like them the bolder we become in the cause of Christ. Listen beloved, I sympathize with this, but if you have no Christian courage. If you have no boldness in your gospel witness. Look you've got to examine the ground of your assurance. You've got to really think through, "do I believe this to such a degree that I'm going to stake my life on it, that I'm going to step out in it, that I'm going to trust this word and let the chips fall where they may." That's what the apostles did.

At the heart of the question there is to examine what do you really fear? Man or God? Jesus said, Matthew 10:28, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." Listen if you fear God you will fear no other.

If you revere God you will not regard yourself, you will entrust yourself into his powerful omnipotent hands. There is no reason for spiritual cowardice. None whatsoever. By God's grace we know the truth, Proverbs 21:30, "There is no wisdom, no understanding, no counsel against the Lord."

We've become possessors of the kingdom of God. We stand in God's favor as the blessed ones. We know the true king. There is no reason at all for cowardice, every reason to show good courage, to be strong and courageous as we grow in holy boldness.

That brings us to a ninth reason, immediately for rejoicing when persecuted. Holy boldness is what steeled the resolve of the Prophets. Rejoice because you are counted among the holy. Rejoice because you are counted among the holy. Verse 23, "The Apostles and Prophets stood fast in holy boldness and even persecution. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy for so their fathers did to the Prophets."

Literally Jesus says, "For their fathers, [that's the fathers of your contemporary persecutors], they did according to the same practice." That is the same hatred, exclusion, reviling and spurning, they did all that to the Prophets. Jesus is saying, "Now it's your turn." Now it's your turn. Hebrews 11, great hall of faith, we read in the exploits of the holy, many of whom were Prophets, lived and died by faith. That great chapter, Hebrews 11:36 and following, some of those suffered mocking, flogging, even chains and imprisonment, they were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword, they went about in the skins of sheep and goats, destitute and mistreated, of whom the world was not worthy. Wandering about in deserts and mountains in dens and caves of the earth.

Look, when we experience the same persecutions in our day, we stand in the company of the prophets who bore the reproach of Christ in their own generations. We have the biblical record. We have the testimony of God who does not lie that suffering for the sake of righteousness is worth it. Not only that but we can read the warning Jesus himself directed to those who like their fathers before him would persecute the Prophet of God.

Luke 11:47 and following, Jesus administering some pretty severe and harsh woes to the religious leadership. "Woe to you, for you build the tombs to the prophets whom your fathers killed, you are witnesses that you consent to the deeds of your fathers. For they killed them and you build their tombs."

Look if you're persecuted for the sake of Christ. You're counted in the company of the holy prophets of old. As well as the New Testament apostles and prophets, as well as Christ himself who was persecuted and killed by ungodly men. It may not seem now but you are blessed. You must rejoice over the honor that's been granted to you to suffer for his name's sake.

That brings us to a final point, tenth reason to rejoice. Rejoice because you will be fully vindicated. You will be fully vindicated. The record will one day be set straight. Not by any man, not by any counsel, not by any government except the government of Christ. By God himself.

Peter encourages us with his word, we read earlier, 1 Peter 4:12-13, "Beloved do not be surprised at the fiery trial

but rejoice in so far as you share in Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed." If you stand with Christ, acknowledge him before men, Jesus promises you, Luke 12:8-9, "I tell you everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God."

Word of warning, "The one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God." But for us who acknowledge him before men, he'll acknowledge us. Like the prophets of old, like the Apostles, like every martyr of Church history, when we endure rejection for the sake of the Son of man. We will be fully and eternally vindicated by divine testimony and final judgment. Romans 8:18-19, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to compare with the glory that's to be revealed in us."

The Apostle John says the same thing, encouraging the faithful saints to stand firm in sanctifying hope. 1 John 3:1-3, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God. And so we are. The reason why, why the world does not know us is that it did not know

him. Beloved, we are God's children now and what we will be has not yet appeared. But we know that when he appears we shall be like him. Because we shall see him as he is and everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."

You know the sweeping, overarching beauty of this entire beatitude? It's totally counter intuitive. But we see here that persecution actually becomes for us a source of strong assurance. To the eternal consternation and frustration of our enemy the devil, rather than causing us to fall away the fires of persecution actually drive us closer to Christ which is what he hates. The more we're drawn closer to Christ, the more we resemble him, the more we long for heaven, the more we grow in courage and boldness, the more we draw fire from the unbelieving world which drives us back to Christ to find more comfort from him which causes us then to be like him.

Persecution for the sake of Christ, one of the greatest sources of Christian assurance, producing in true Christians exactly what the Devil hopes to whither. Love and devotion for Christ, love and devotion to the source of our faith and the end of our hope.

Well there you have it, ten reasons to rejoice when we're persecuted on account of Christ. Because you're the blessed of Christ. Resembling Christ, condemned by Christ's enemies. On the right side of history. Drawing close to Christ, growing in Christ likeness, longing for heaven, growing in holy boldness, counted among the holy, fully vindicated. And I've run out of fingers.

May that encourage us though to obey our Lord's clear gracious command in the day of persecution. Rejoice in that day, leap for joy for behold your reward is great in heaven. For so their fathers did to the prophets. Let's pray.

We thank you our God for this word from the Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank you that we are righteous in him. All our sins are forgiven in the cross and all of his righteousness covers us like a, like a wedding garment. We, like him, now stand before you spotless with no condemnation. And as we think about the opportunity to share in Christ's sufferings, we, we must admit that our frail human hearts are weakened at times and anxious. Let that drive us to

our knees in prayer. That we may find from you strength by the Holy Spirit to lift us up again and stand in the face of persecution with Christ like virtue.