

Sermon on the Mount – Blessed are the Persecuted

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MAIN VERSES

[Matthew 5:3](#) • [Matthew 5:4](#) • [Matthew 5:5](#) • [Matthew 5:6](#) • [Matthew 5:7](#) • [Matthew 5:8](#) • [Matthew 5:9](#)

All right, Shabbat Shalom everybody. Good to come together again today. We're in a special part of the calendar year. In the Christian calendar, many Christians are celebrating Resurrection Sunday tomorrow. This year, with how Passover lines up, we're about a month past them or around the same time. We've got what, three more weeks or so. But it's neat to be able to revisit this story.

It's a huge time of the year for us as well with Passover, but not only that, with First Fruits, remembering the mission of our Messiah, the mission of the King to grant a new type of festival of freedom. Not one that is simply remembered as happening to our ancestors, but one that is occurring even now through every single one of us. We are no longer slaves to sin and death. We are no longer slaves to the oppressive powers of this world because we have been redeemed. We've been redeemed by a greater Passover and a greater Exodus.

We've been going through the Sermon on the Mount these past couple months—a few weeks—and the Beatitudes. I think we're finally at the end of the introduction of the Sermon on the Mount, which is the Beatitudes. We're going to review the last one today: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God." And then Yeshua kind of wraps up the entire Beatitudes in another verse where he essentially says that, yeah, you're going to be made fun of. They're going to call you names. No one's going to like you. They're going to beat you up. They're probably going to kill you. And so don't worry about it because you're living the good life in this liminal space between the corruption of the world and the fullness of the kingdom of God overtaking it. Those types of people are right on the threshold of experiencing the fullness of the kingdom of God.

The Good Life in a Broken World

These are the types of people that already get it, if you will. They see the world the way it is and they know what it could be. Can you imagine a world that is in chaos? It's not necessarily a fictional thing, I know. Imagine a world that is just in chaos. There are wars. There are rumors of wars. We love to throw that verse out there every time—it's chaos in the world, right? It's happening. There are wolves in sheep's clothing everywhere, and we have to pay attention. We have to be awake. Make sure we have lots of oil for our lamps to see, right? On a national scale, imagine a place where you're so paranoid of what's going on in the world that you don't know who you can trust in your country. Spies could be anyone you meet. And all this is happening because we felt like we needed to defend our freedoms. We need to make sure we fight for truth as a nation. We need to make sure we fight for the liberty of the greatest nation in the world. Sometimes we have to defend ourselves, right? When it comes down to it, sometimes we have to defend ourselves. Sometimes we have to go into battle to protect our nation.

And you can almost imagine this scenario in a world like this with a nation like this: at the same time, a bunch of leftists are just trying to stand outside and protest the security of the nation. Can you imagine in this nation where they found some leftists outside a college handing out anti-war pamphlets encouraging people to turn their backs on their great nation and join this resistance? What would you do with people who don't want freedom for themselves or freedom for other people? What do you do with those kinds of people that stand up against the pursuit of such things? When will enough be enough for these types of people in this nation? If we're here, how long should they put up with these types of anti-patriotic liberals? Have you ever seen someone who is against your political ideology and in your mind you're like, yeah, they should totally be arrested, right? And then you try to think of a way to charge them—yeah, they should totally be charged for something. I mean, you try to find a reason why they should be arrested. But they need to be arrested because they're the antagonists of everything that we're for. So yeah, I think they should be arrested for treason, right? Because it's obviously treason. I'm not going to spread anti-patriotic propaganda in my country. No, no.

Do they not even realize? Can you imagine someone just ignoring the fact that so many soldiers have died and are fighting and dying right now for the freedoms that they're enjoying?

Sophia Scholl and the White Rose

And this scenario is not of a fictional world. Surprise. It's of a very real world that existed in 1943 in Nazi Germany, a nation that plunged into fascism, creating a social structure of power designed to give men the position of authority over the nation and, of course, over other demographics. Women were encouraged to go home. You don't need to go get a job. You don't

need to get an education. The best thing that you can do for the empire is to breed so that we can grow in power and numbers. That was part of the gameplay as well.

Germany had expanded across Europe, and they were doing pretty well at their expansion. And part of their goal was to become the successor to the two prior German empires. And so they wanted to be the Third Empire or the Third Reich. That was the pursuit. Because the more that you conquer, the more peace and stability you have, right? You have more power and control. And while this was going on, there was a group of young German college students who formed a resistance group called the White Rose. It was a non-violent resistance group against the Nazis.

And here's one of them who is more well-known: Sophia Scholl. Here's a picture of her, hanging out with some of her friends, right? She was one of those who would spread anti-war pamphlets and call for resistance against the government at Munich University. And of course, after a while, these students were caught and charged with treason. Here's another picture of her, just hanging out with her friends, right? And that's when she was arrested for handing such things out.

When she and her brother and her friend were arrested, they were charged with treason and found guilty. And after four days, all three of them were beheaded by the guillotine for their crimes against their nation. She was 21.

But we had to do something because she was causing a disruption in our pursuit of peace, our pursuit of the mission, if you will. So the German army had no problems executing people for such things. We can always justify everything when we have a mission.

There is some debate on what her last words were. One account says they were, "The sun still shines." Another claim is this quote from Sophia Scholl:

"How can we expect righteousness to prevail when there is hardly anyone willing to give himself up individually to a righteous cause? It is such a splendid sunny day. And I have to go. But how many have to die on the battlefield in these days? How many young, promising lives? What does my death matter if by our acts thousands are warned and alerted? Among the student body, there will certainly be a revolt."

The Beatitudes Revisited

Yours is the good life. Blessed, right? Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. We've

talked about how that word—when it appears throughout the scriptures—it's not necessarily a blessing in the traditional sense. It's used in interpersonal relationships to describe how someone else is living the good life. Man, that's the good life for so-and-so because he won the lottery. Yeah, that's a good life, right? He has a good life because he has a good job, good car, so on and so forth. It's not something you just say someone was given, right?

Which makes it so ironic and almost dark when Yeshua uses that phrase and pairs it with all of these things that we would never, ever wish to be a part of intentionally. But he's saying, hey, those who are poor in spirit, who have been broken in their lives, man, yours is the good life. Yours is the good life, you who are mourning, because you're going to be comforted. Those who are merciful, you will receive mercy. Blessed are the peacemakers. The good life belongs to the peacemakers, those who are constantly involved in resolving conflict so that conflict dies and does not become perpetuated. For they shall be called the sons of God. Oh, the good life. Why is this the good life? Why is it the good life of those who hunger and thirst for righteousness? For they shall be satisfied. Because it's a good life. Because more than anyone else, the people who fit these descriptions are right there. They're the closest to the type of people that God is calling around him, because they know what the world is and they know that it can only get better. And so these people have a hope that will persevere.

And we come to verse 10: blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake—the good life belongs to them. Don't worry. All the prophets that came before you died. You got the good life because you're going to get it too. It's so encouraging, isn't it? We read it so many times and it loses its sharpness.

In other words, when you have been through experiences in this world, seen things, then you see it very clearly for what it is.

Standing Firm

While everyone else is still migrating forward in life, if you will. Some people understand what it means to be persecuted, and some people don't. Most of us probably don't, but all the same, there are some people that have experiences in this world that allow them to have the capacity for a greater hope. Because whatever that wound is or whatever that vacuum is has to be filled with something. And these are people that choose to fill it with hope. Because what else are they going to do with it?

So we live in a world where we're often motivated through media, social media, phones, whatever. We're often shuffled around, encouraged to flock over toward an opinion or over

toward some type of political ideology. When you turn on the news, generally speaking, and I know we always pick on, like, okay, we got CNN and we got Fox News, and they say some stuff that's different. But generally, when you watch the media, there tends to be a slant towards a particular audience in a certain direction, right? And during the political seasons when we have two very, very clear separate opinions, we turn on the TV and we're either trying to be swayed to one or swayed to the other as if it's the only two choices, as if we have to. Here are our options and one is righteous and one is not. Why is one righteous and one's not? Well, because I support one and not the other. Therefore, it has to be righteous, and I'm going to stand for righteousness, right?

And the type of people that are mentioned here are those people that have seen stuff so much, they're familiar with it, that while everyone else is moving over to this candidate or that idea or this opinion, they're standing there not moving because they know what's up. They know what's happening. They know they need to remain here because right where they're standing is where justice is. And moving away from that would be an injustice.

And so when people do things like that, they don't flock with the rest of the crowd or the popular opinion. They tend to be seen as someone who's resisting, someone who is now against. Rightfully so. Rightfully so. It's such an irony that every single time there's a conflict or a war throughout history, soldiers on every side believe that they're the ones fighting for justice, right? Like we're the ones fighting for the cause, the right cause. We love fighting for something. It's very empowering to take a stand for something. And we love to use that because there's something about being called to rise up, right? Just gets your blood flowing. We love that in evangelical settings for conferences. That's why we love to name all of our conferences things like Rise Up 2024, right? Be Bold. Stand Up, right? We love this idea of, yes, now we can be the revolutionaries. Usually it's not for anything that's revolutionary, but we get excited. And it's good to be excited. It's good to be excited. It's good to be excited when we see injustice in the world and the opportunity to stand up to it.

But the thing that we have to be careful of is, will we actually stand up to it? Most of us have a lot of zeal when it comes to viewing the government. How many of you have ever been in a situation in your life where you felt like Jesus was being threatened so that you had to stand up for him? Especially in the 90s, there was a big push to encourage people to have a zeal to defend Jesus. And of course, the only person that was going to take away Jesus is, of course, the U.S. government, right? And so we have this huge zeal that the government is coming to take our religion away. It's coming to take Jesus away. And so in school, we have this event that takes place outside at the pole. And so we march over to that pole and we stand against the

persecution that's occurring to us. And I was proud of it when I used to do that. But I don't think that's what Jesus is calling his type of people to simply be. Because we always talk about defending and standing up for the person being persecuted for our faith. But that's not what these verses are talking about.

We get excited when we watch the Oscars and we see a celebrity that has no business talking about Jesus or God, at least with the lifestyle that we've been exposed to. We don't know their heart, I'm just saying, from what we've been exposed to. But we get so excited when that same celebrity will go up to the Oscars and he will dedicate his statue to Jesus, right? And we get excited about that. We get excited. We're like, that's right, represent. Yes. Yes. And we feel as if we need to stand up and support because we're the Christian and that's good. And then when someone says, hey, you need to sit down or that's just too much or why are you? And then, of course, we get the convenient claim of persecution. And again, I don't think that's what Jesus is talking about there. These verses are not encouraging you to stand up for Jesus. You can do that. You can do that rightfully so. But these verses are encouraging you to stand up against injustice and stand up for justice. You stand up against injustice. If no injustice is happening, then what are you standing up for? These verses encourage us to stand up for righteousness. And when we do that correctly, we'll be doing it for his sake. We'll be doing it on his behalf. So we will be representing Jesus. But this verse is not speaking of a display of Christian identity.

When Persecution Begins

When you stand up against the world, against injustice and against unrighteousness, you become the stargate to the kingdom of God. When we choose and make that choice to say, you know what, this is wrong, and everyone else in the world is trying to fight or trying to say, no, it's not, or trying to say these people are no. When you make the choice to stand against that for something that is right, you have now allowed the kingdom of God to pierce through into this world. And you're that receptacle that the world is looking at to see what is different, what is radical, what is actually happening here. Never seen this before. This person is actually standing up for something. And when you stand up against injustice and unrighteousness, it gets seen. And heaven is always a threat to those who call hell their home. And so there's resistance when this occurs. There's resistance to keep everything the way that it's always been. To keep the things that give me the most power unrighteous. To keep the things that I've surrounded myself with that make me feel safe. And that's when persecution begins.

And we've all been there, right? We know about some Christian persecution. We've all been there, especially in the late 90s. You remember? Y'all don't remember. It was, how could you

forget? It was a big deal. You remember that lady at JCPenney that was checking you out. She said, happy holidays. And we knew that the Antichrist was around the corner. The tribulation is coming. And I think she had the mark of the beast on her forehead. I don't know. When we have it so good, we have to become desperate. No, when you stand against corruption, evil, injustice, and grasping at the political sword of power, you're putting the cross in the crosshairs of that to be fired upon. And to make sure that there's no confusion, Yeshua here compares these people with the prophets of God. The prophets of old who stood against corruption, evil, injustice, the idolatry of political identity, Amos, Jeremiah, Micah, Ezekiel, and the rest. And those are the prophets that were very much so rejected because they dare challenge the king, they dare challenge the elite, they dare challenge the politics, the rich. They would dare challenge the society as a whole and condemn it as unjust against the kingdom of God. And they too were sent to the guillotine. This is the atmosphere that Yeshua is telling us to prepare for.

The Real Test

When you reach the event horizon of the kingdom of God, you exist both within it as well as in this world simultaneously. And that gets attention. And when we talk about this, we always talk about like we would totally do that, right? I mean, we would totally be the people that would stand against everyone else for righteousness. Right? At least we'd like to think that we would, right? I mean, back in the first century during the time of Yeshua, the government was Rome. Too easy. Too easy. Of course we'll stand against Rome. Throw my fists up, screaming, tyranny! Be against class warfare there. Stop the violent corruption. And then I guess in our mind, if we had the opportunity to stand up against Rome, all of our buddies would run out and stand together, and we would be united against Rome, right? We would be those people. And I'm not so sure we would. I'm not so sure all of us would. I'm not so sure the majority of us probably would. I don't know. But it's easy to say I'm against Rome. But let's flip it a little bit.

Against Your Own

What about when injustice occurs within the scope of the temple, the scope of the priesthood, within the ranks of the community leaders, the Pharisees? Are we then prepared to really stand up against our friends, our family, our entire community for the sake of the kingdom of God, standing for God's standard of righteousness? That's tough. I mean, it might divide your family, and Jesus has that effect. And when it comes to standing up for what is right, the one thing I find beautiful in the sense of everything humanity is capable of and yet unrighteous, yet we all

tend to find ourselves at home in this endless absurd irony of life, right? And so we all know what it's like to stand up, or at least have the idea of standing up against something that is unjust. But sometimes we end up standing for things we think are just and aren't in the end, right?

If you get 10 human beings in a room, you get about 13 strongly-haired opinions, right? We always tend to think that we're right. And when we're right, no one else is, which means they're wrong. Everybody thinks they're right. And we all have that moment where we stand up for what's righteous, if you will. We have that sense when it's time to stand up.

Standing Through the Lens of History

And if we lived in Germany alongside Sophia Scholl, I know that every one of us would have stood against the government, the war, the atrocities. We never would have fallen for the national propaganda that we then indoctrinated into our children, right? You saw the picture of the little girl? Our children watch us.

Just 60 years ago, The Civil Rights Act was signed into law in this country. In the 50s and 60s, we all know history, and I know all of us would have stood in protest against the stores and the businesses and the government that would not serve blacks or would pass laws that would prevent entire demographics of people from thriving in this nation. I know that every one of us would have gotten in the face of the police and we would have told them that their power is weak in the shadow of the people, right?

Every one of us would have, right? I mean, we all know that we, like me, would be the one protesting. Probably not everybody. Not all y'all. Definitely me, right? Definitely.

The Inversion: Standing for the Wrong Thing

And I think that's the danger here. Because on the flip side, the inversion of standing up for something that is righteous and experiencing persecution and being zealous to stand up for it, the inversion and the irony in that is many times we stand up for things that we label as righteous but aren't. We fantasize about standing up for righteousness, but that righteousness is usually defined by the system that is unrighteous. Oh, here we go. Here are the photos, yeah.

So during the Civil Rights Movement, a couple photos. The first one, I thought—this is how bad propaganda got in the 50s and 60s, because you had the whole Red Scare thing going on. So the whole point of CIA being created is to spread information and misinformation about the

USSR so that everybody would be scared of the big Cs, okay? Many people were put in jail. Lots of people lost their careers because people suspected they're communists, and they weren't, and it was a big ordeal.

But here we see that interracial gatherings in school is communism. Oh, because everyone gets equal rights? Everyone has a fair share? How is that? But when you have people that don't understand what communism is, they just know it's bad, I don't want to be a communist by allowing my kids to go to school with some other demographic of kids, so we need to stand against this.

But the little girl in the next photo, here we go, indoctrinating our children by what we think is right. So remember I was speaking about the Confederate flags and how there was an uptick in distribution and manufacturing during the Civil Rights Movement, so here's the next picture. And here we go. The cheap little flags like the ones you can buy at Myrtle Beach. They have a point with communism though. I don't want to be a communist, so therefore I won't support equal rights for everybody. Everyone gets the same amount of rights? No.

And it's up to us to guard ourselves when we feel a tug to protest something because everyone else is all of a sudden doing it. Or we should learn to recognize when wisdom speaks so that we know when to stand. Many, many, many times looking through history, the just side of history was marked with being on the side that was not popular, except by a few that were paying attention, who were not asleep, right? They're the ones that stood, and they paid a price for it, but it was to get everybody to notice.

Ruby Bridges: Standing for the First Time

In 1960, in Louisiana, there was a young black girl who was six years old, and she was walking to school on this specific day. It was her first day of attending William France Elementary School. And there was a lot of commotion. Huge crowds of people were at the school, expecting her to come and screaming her name. This was the first time a black girl had ever attended this school. And it would be the first time in this nation that a black child had ever attended a previously labeled all-white school.

But the people that were there expecting her and screaming her name, they were not there to support her. They were actually protesting because this was something new and something scary. And people have a place in this society and now they're breaking into my space and I must paint me a sign and go out with my kids and protest. Thank you, Alexa. Because this is an injustice that we need to stand against.

Now, I think I have a picture of Ruby Bridges, this little girl. Not that one. Go back. Is it not in there, huh? Okay, well, Ruby Bridges was this little girl.

And I want you to imagine being so zealous for your cause that you not only are going to make a sign, go down and protest for what you feel is right and this injustice that is being caused upon you, but imagine if you decide to take it a step further and you use your master arts and crafts skills to take this whole protest of a six-year-old walking to school, this protest to the next level. So you decide that you're going to build a life-size child's casket and put a modified black baby doll in it, because I don't think they had black baby dolls at that point, at least in this style. And this is going to be your symbol of protest. Doing your best to depict this child and match it up to the little six-year-old girl that is walking in front of you into the school. And she walks past you, and now imagine that you're so excited to finally have your chance to speak that with glee you're telling this six-year-old that she's not human enough to be here. And all of this happens with all of your friends smiling as you participate in this righteous protest.

That Was Someone's Grandma

That's one of y'all's grandmas, by the way. I mean, these are people that are still alive, many of them. And I'd like to think that today this woman has a deep regret in how she thought and how she was trained to think. And I'd like to think that she realizes now how dumb that was. And if that is the case, if that is the case, then how easy it is to happen to us when we look at other people.

Ruby Bridges had to bring her own lunch to school every single day. She could not eat in the cafeteria because the threat of her being poisoned to death was so great. She didn't join the classrooms with other kids because it was just too controversial and the danger was too great. So I believe she had a private room, private tutor.

Everybody who protested thought it was the right thing to do. That's what scares me the most. And I think it's healthy to think like this. Maybe it just breeds humility, I don't know, but... Every generation before you stood for something that was likely unrighteous or unjust at some point in time, the majority. But the people of that generation thought it was the right thing to do. And then a generation later, those same people now realize, oh, I was on the wrong side.

And what scares me the most is looking at so many of these people who were involved against the civil rights movement and hearing them talk with such blindness: "Yeah, I didn't realize we were just so caught up." I mean, excuses, but regret.

Which Thing Will I Be Wrong About?

I've seen that so many times across so many situations that what scares me the most is which thing will I be referring to in 20 years when I look back at what I stood against or I did not stand up for? I don't know. I don't know. But neither did any generation before me. I don't know what it could be. I don't know. But I like to think about that a lot, and I think you should too.

Stand and Rise Up

Stand. Rise up for justice. Be bold for righteousness. Be zealous for equity. And when you choose to stand counter to how this world works and encourages you to stand, you open up the portal to the kingdom of heaven. It pierces through in that moment, and it's felt, and it's radical, and that's how we change the world. But it always comes with persecution. Standing against injustice always does. And that makes sense to expect that if we're called to follow Christ, and he stood against injustice, and he brought peace where there was conflict, and he forgave those, and he blessed those, and he healed those, and he represented the kingdom of heaven as active now on earth, and they killed him for it. They killed him for it.

Following Yeshua

But we're called to follow. We're called to mimic the way of Yeshua. And it's not for the weak. And if we find ourselves unwilling to suffer for the sake of righteousness of Christ, then we also find ourselves reaching for the sword of political power, which always corrupts. And sometimes we find ourselves claiming to be persecuted when all the while we were the ones persecuting others.

Rejoice, you who have the good life, you who are flourishing, you who stand for righteousness and are persecuted as a result. Yours is the kingdom of heaven. So guys, I want you to always be looking for opportunities to represent the kingdom of God in the earth. And that means reflecting who Yeshua is. And there may be a time when there is injustice and there's a time to stand and there's a time to plant your feet. And it will be a time when the majority around you will likely not agree.

Prepare for that, do it anyway, and stand. As you find yourself standing up with the zeal to fight against unrighteousness and injustice in the world, to fight against evil, stop and ask yourself: Am I being the oppressor? Am I really being persecuted? And is this something 20 years from now I'm going to look back on and say, you know what? That was not at all what I thought it was, but yet I was there speaking against it or whatever. We need to be zealous, but we need to

be humble. This is how the Beatitudes ends. This is what the good life looks like. It's backwards. It's radical. It's everything that this world is not, which is why it has to be successful. So stand for truth, persevere through persecution, and always audit if you're on the right side of that persecution. So please stand as we conclude services today.

Alvina Malkano, our Father, our King Father, we thank you for the opportunity to come and to dive into your word once again as you remind us who you're calling us to be and what it looks like to be a soldier of Christ, an ambassador of heaven. Father, I ask that the Holy Spirit that is within us even now would continue doing its work, would continue to give us courage, to give us a sense of authority and strength, to see clearly where we need to be standing in the world. We thank you, Father, for your grace and your mercy, and we thank you for our King Yeshua. In his name we pray. Amen.

Shema and Blessings

Sing the Shema with me. Shema Israel Uksheke Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. Blessed is the name of his glorious kingdom for all eternity. May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance toward you and give you peace. Shabbat shalom.

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