

The Most Challenging Beatitude: Blessed Are The Persecuted

Rich Nathan
February 4-5, 2006
Life As It Was Meant To Be
Matthew 5:10-12

I've been doing a series from the Sermon on the Mount and today we arrive in our study at what is the most challenging of the Beatitudes.

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Mt 5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Mt 5:11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds
of evil against you because of me.

Mt 5:12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way
they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

For those of you who consider yourselves followers of Christ, have you ever faced serious opposition because of your Christian faith? Have you ever been talked about, made fun of; lost a job, been financially hurt, been alienated from family or friends simply because you are a Christian and you have committed yourself to follow Christ?

Most of you know that I was raised in a Jewish family. When I was 18 years old, God broke into my life and I became a follower of Christ. My parents were divorced and my Jewish Dad was remarried to a Jewish woman, whose son had also become a follower of Christ. My dad regularly pointed out to her that his son, Rich, would never do what her son did because her son wasn't very bright and didn't do well academically. Whereas, my dad's son was way too smart to believe in this Jesus stuff.

So I came to Christ and went out to California to spend time with my dad and stepmother. The first day I was there, my dad was going on and on comparing his son with my stepmother's son – how his son would never believe in Christ. I had to interrupt my dad and say, "Well, actually, dad, I've also become a follower of Jesus." My dad, with whom I've always had a warm and affectionate relationship, cursed me out to my face.

It is a very hard thing to be cursed out by your own father. His anger continued for days. He was violently upset with the decision I had made.

When I told my mother what I had done, she also yelled at me. I told my best friend, who I had walked together with through my parent's divorce, through lots of difficulties in his life – we were so close we used to call one another "brother." I took a walk on a beach in New York with my best friend at night and told him what I had done. My Jewish best friend burst into tears. He couldn't even speak. And that evening he stopped being my best friend.

I've talked with lots of Jewish people over the years who were investigating the Christian faith. One of the things that we have talked about is what they might expect from their parents, grandparents, friends, and community if they chose to trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Here in the United States we put up signs, "Come, visit us here at Vineyard Columbus." We have a big billboard on Rt. 161 inviting folks to come to church. We are constantly inviting folks to our welcome dinner, and to various things we have going on here at the church. You can hear my messages online. You can find the church in the Yellow Pages, but do you know there was a time when Christians were hated, hunted, and had to meet in secret? And this is the case today in many countries around the world. Indeed, in many parts of the world pastors sermons are hidden for fear that someone's life will be endangered if they are discovered.

I have an acquaintance who talked about doing a women's Bible study in a city in the Middle East. The way they did the study was that women came to a house one at a time over the course of 12 hours or so, so as not to attract attention that there was a meeting going on in this house. Then this American Christian met with these 15 Arab women in an attic with the curtains drawn. They studied the scriptures together. This American Christian woman said that she never felt nearer to God in her life than when they quietly sang hymns together, or when she heard these women pray. The women spent the night at this house, and then one by one over the course of the next day, they left.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

This week I received an email from an Indian Christian who oversees a large Christian ministry in India. He wrote and said:

It is my sad duty to share with you the news that one of our Gospel for Asia native missionaries has been kidnapped by terrorists [in a particular Indian state]. This pastor is a young, single missionary who has already started five mission stations with 28 believers. He was returning home in a taxi with five other people. But they never reached their destination.

Yesterday this pastor's parents received a letter that said that he had been kidnapped by an extremist Marxist group.

The GFA letter went on to say that this latter incident comes in a week in which we have received reports of more than two dozen of our native missionaries and Bible College students being badly beaten in Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. It also comes as hundreds of thousands of Hindus are planning to swarm into a tribal area of Gujarat in order to persecute the Christians living there. Please pray for this pastor's safe release; pray also for his parents that God would be with them through this ordeal, and please join me

and the rest of the GFA family in praying for all of our persecuted brothers and sisters across South Asia, who are suffering at the hands of anti-Christian elements.

I received this two days ago.

Persecution against Christians, in other words, is not just an ancient story. David Barrett, the premier statistician of global Christianity said that if you totaled up the number of Christians who had been martyred in the 20th century, the number would average about 300,000 a year. 300,000 people a year are murdered because they are Christians.

So, as we continue in this study from the Sermon on the Mount, I've called my message, "The Most Challenging Beatitude: Blessed Are the Persecuted." Let's pray.

SLIDE – Matthew 5.10-12

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they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Who is it that is persecuted? Notice, Jesus repeats this beatitude two times. It is the only double beatitude that we have. He really wants us to get it and to make sure that we get it, Jesus shifts his language from the third person,

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And notice, he shifts to the second person in v. 11,

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of evil against you because of me.

This is the only beatitude that is stated in the second person. Jesus apparently does not want us to take this beatitude at arm's length. He does not want this statement about persecution to simply sail over our heads. He wants to take this beatitude about persecution and screw it into our foreheads. Jesus does not allow us the liberty to smugly nod our heads and say, "Yes, yes...those poor persecuted believers in India, or in the Muslim world. Blessed are they. Oh, I found the story of the early church and their suffering so inspiring. Blessed are they who are persecuted." Jesus says, "Blessed are you..."

This statement about persecution and being spoken against applies to each of you without exception, if you are a follower of Christ. In other words, this is as much a mark of the Christian life as being a peacemaker, or being merciful, or grieving over our sins. Being opposed, being cursed at, losing a job promotion, suffering financially, having problems with your family and problems with your friends is a mark of you being a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. There is no escape for anyone who chooses to follow Jesus Christ.

Some years ago I taught at Ohio State. I was invited to do a little faculty roundtable for other Christian faculty. We were enjoying a very pleasant and cordial faculty lunch together when one young assistant professor innocently asked the question: "How can I be a Christian and witness to my faith without it affecting me in terms of the way the rest of the faculty relates to me? How can I share my Christian faith without in any way impinging upon the tenure decision that is coming up in two years?"

So I said to him, "Well, let me see if I understand your question. You are wondering how you can be a true follower of Jesus in your department and not have it impact your professional advancement at all. Is that the question?"

He said, "Yes."

So, then I asked him, "Well, whatever made you think that you could follow Christ and have it not impact you professionally? Why did you think that there would not be a price associated with your followership of Christ?" Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you."

The leader of the meeting immediately shut down this little dialogue between me and this other faculty member. We were entering the realm of controversy. I was not, in any way, seeking to be controversial or mean-spirited, or unpleasant. But you see, Jesus says being opposed, having people say mean things about you, suffering professionally because of your Christian faith, being persecuted, these are the marks of the gospelized.

Friend, we need to therefore ask ourselves the very searching question: If I never face opposition because of my faith, then what does that say about the reality of my Christian profession? If I've never been made fun of, never been rejected, never lost anything, never paid a significant price, then how did these beatitudes relate to me?

That is why I said at the beginning, this is the most challenging of the beatitudes, especially for us in America.

But why does Jesus say that we will be persecuted? Notice Jesus in this text does not say, "Blessed are the persecuted," period. He doesn't stop merely with "blessed are the persecuted," as he does with "blessed are the peacemakers." Apparently, there is a blessing on peacemakers in an unlimited and unrestricted way. But here, Jesus tightens the circle of those upon whom blessing is pronounced. It is not "Blessed are

the persecuted however and for whatever reason they are persecuted.” Jesus says of that class of people who are persecuted, I am pronouncing blessing only on those who are persecuted because of righteousness.

Then in v. 11, of the world of folks who are persecuted, I am pronouncing blessing only upon those people who are persecuted because of me.

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Jesus is not pronouncing blessing upon people who are persecuted because they are annoying. He is not pronouncing blessing upon those who are opposed because they are pushy, or tactless, or obnoxious, or lacking in wisdom, or are bringing suffering on themselves.

A member of the congregation wrote to me this week and said that he was so upset one morning this week. As he was getting out of his car at the State House, there were folks who were protesting, holding signs saying, “God hates fags.” This member of our church approached some police officers who were standing there laughing at the protestors. He asked them, “Are you going to remove these guys?” The policemen said, “No, they have a legal permit to protest.”

Jesus is not pronouncing blessing on those who are persecuted because they are religious bigots, because they are ignorant, because you are a know-it-all. How many of you immediately in the aftermath of following Christ experienced opposition from your family because you suddenly became a religious know-it-all? Did any of you write a letter to your parents in the aftermath of your Christian conversion explaining to your parents, or your grandparents or siblings why they were not real Christians and might actually end up in hell? I’ve had lots of conversations with folks who wrote to their Roman Catholic or Lutheran parents or grandparents and told them why their Christianity was not true Christianity and why they would end up in hell.

Jesus is not pronouncing a blessing on the over-zealous know-it-all. He is not pronouncing a blessing on the campus preachers, who point at women in the crowd, calling them “whores.” The blessing is restricted to those who are persecuted because of righteousness.

Do you know, friends, when the world experiences goodness, when someone is around a person of great integrity, when people in the larger society experience righteous living, someone who is sexually pure, who retains their virginity until marriage, who is honest and clean, and non-gossiping, and doesn’t party and is not self-asserting, and is gracious and doesn’t play the office political game – that goodness and righteousness will be experienced by the unrighteous either as blessing or as threat. Goodness is

always experienced by people by one of two ways. Goodness can be welcomed as a sign-post pointing to Christ. The person says, "I don't know what it is about you, but you have something I don't have and it is making me hungry for it, it makes me thirsty for it. That is what I experienced when I was around Marlene when I was not yet a Christian. There was something in her life, a goodness that I wanted and knew I didn't have.

But many folks have an opposite response to goodness and righteousness. Righteousness is experienced as a threat. What I mean when I say that righteousness is experienced as a threat, I mean that it could underline the gulf between God's ways and the world's ways as rottenness in a person is exposed. That person may respond defensively. "You are a goody-two-shoes." "She thinks she's so perfect."

If you are in high school and aren't dating, or sleeping with the opposite sex, you can have your sexual orientation called into question. If you do great work and don't brag about it, you may be labeled as someone who doesn't have a killer instinct, someone who is kind of weak or passive. If you care about your family and you don't spend every evening out drinking with clients you may be labeled as someone who is not a team player. If you refuse to compromise your basic values, you may be experienced by the world as someone who is stubborn or inflexible, or out of touch with what is necessary to be successful in business. As the managing partner of a law firm once said to me, "We can't have someone working here with your kind of moral reservations."

You see, a person who genuinely pursues righteousness in an unrighteous world is going to experience the clash of two kingdoms: the kingdom of God confronting the kingdom of this world. Let me ask you, have you ever been labeled? Have you ever been excluded? Have you ever been spoken against? Has there been any need for you to pay a price because of righteousness in your life?

But there is a second good reason Jesus lists for why we might be persecuted. That is because of me. v. 11,

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Mt 5:11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

I don't know if you are familiar with the name, Helen Roseveare. Helen was a missionary doctor to the Congo. After an extended furlough, she returned to the Congo in 1964, three weeks before Civil War broke out and violence against missionaries began. Various missionary boards were pulling their staffs out, but Dr. Helen remained. There were so many medical needs, that she felt called by God to stay in spite of the danger.

Staying in the Congo turned into a nightmare for Helen Roseveare. In the next four years she was attacked, she was beaten, she was raped, and finally she was imprisoned by rebel Simba soldiers who threatened to murder her during the five months of her captivity. But during those five months, she continued to tell people

about Christ. And because she had experienced rape herself, she was able to comfort and bear witness to many other Congolese rape victims.

Over the last several decades, God has used Helen Roseveare to inspire and motivate thousands of college students to give their lives to world missions. What is her message? Helen Roseveare says, "Everywhere I go in the West, I tell Christians that they must re-fall in love with Jesus. Christianity in the West says that we must have bigger cars, bigger houses, a better job. Once Christians fall out of love with all of that, and fall in love with Jesus, I won't need to talk about world missions. People will become missionaries because they love him."

Why would anyone put themselves in a position in which they could be attacked or abused or spoken against, or hurt? Because they love Christ. That is what Jesus is saying.

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Mt 5:11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Because you love me.

Let me ask you a question: Are you willing to suffer a loss of someone's respect simply because you love Jesus? You are a student. You are an employee who is regarded as reasonably intelligent and thoughtful. During a group discussion in class, a professor challenges you or your boss or coworker challenges you at work and says: "You don't really believe that if someone doesn't put their faith in Jesus, they are going to burn in hell, do you? Certainly, you don't believe that the entire human race descended from one human couple, Adam and Eve, do you? Are you trying to suggest that Christianity is in some way superior to Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, and all the other great faiths?"

Your heart is pounding. Your palms are sweating. What do you do, friend? Sometimes when you are suddenly put on the spot, the only issue is will you stand with Christ simply because you love him? There is no time for a smooth answer. There is no opportunity for finesse. You can't say, "Hey, I know someone who can answer this a whole lot better than me." Will you stand with Christ and be laughed at because you love him?

You know – you can't always be a "cool Christian" – people affirming you saying, "I like you so much better than other Christians I know. You are a cool Christian." Sometimes, friends, you have to choose between being cool and being a Christian.

Sadly, the opposition the follower of Christ often experiences does not come from those who deny the claims of Christ. Sometimes, we Christians experience friendly fire. Are you familiar with that term?

Pat Tillman, the great all-pro NFL safety, who was killed in Afghanistan was killed by friendly fire. That means he was accidentally shot by American troops. Sadly, being killed by friendly fire is something that happens in the Body of Christ all the time. The apostle Paul certainly knew about friendly fire. Read the book of Galatians or 2 Corinthians.

If you want a contemporary illustration of friendly fire, consider the controversy surrounding the recent movie release of *The End of the Spear* that was made by Every Tribe Entertainment, an evangelical Christian film company. For years we Christians have complained about the agendas and content of many Hollywood produced movies. Finally, a movie came out, made by an evangelical film company that relates the true story of five American missionaries who were killed in 1956 by a tribe in Ecuador. The missionaries' families convert the tribe to Christianity. The film has great production values. It is not one of those preachy Christian films. The cinematography is fabulous. The story is one of redemption and hope. You come away from the movie feeling not only clean, but inspired. Does the Christian community support this film? Of course not. Because several days before the movie was released, it was discovered that a lead actor in the film is gay. Hundreds of churches around America have decided to publicly boycott the movie and have sent out tens of thousands of emails. Things have gotten so heated for the Every Tribe Entertainment Film Company, they had to actually turn over emails to the FBI because they were receiving death threats. Every Tribe tried to stand by the actor that they had cast. They said that he was, by far, the best actor for the part. "We disagree with him about homosexuality. But we love him and work with him and we feel that is the biblical position."

Apparently, not good enough for hundreds of churches across America.

Have you ever been subjected to friendly fire? Which leads to a very unsettling question raised by this text. What do you as a follower of Christ expect in life? From the beginning, Jesus told his followers to expect the same ugly, terrible treatment that he received. Matthew 10.22,

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Mt 10:22 All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

He even promises that if we were to leave every city where we are hated and persecuted, we would not run out of cities before his second coming. Matthew 10.23,

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Mt 10:23 When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

Now, imagine this promise for your future. There will always been someone who hates you, if you are a follower of Christ. You will never run out of places where you are not

welcome. Is this the message that you hear preached on Christian television, or in popular American Christian books?

We have a peculiar version of Christianity here in America. I just want to read to you from a contemporary Christian book. The author is a follower of Christ. He loves the Lord, but I want you to hear what he says in his book. You could find these ideas in lots of contemporary books:

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The Bible clearly states, "God has crowned us with glory and honor." The word honor could also be translated as "favor." And favor means "to assist, to provide with special advantages, and to receive preferential treatment." In other words, God wants to make your life easier. God wants to make your life more comfortable. He wants to assist you, to promote you, to give you advantages. He wants you to have preferential treatment. If we are going to experience more of God's favor, we must live more favor-minded, expecting more of God's special help and enjoying God's special promotions.

In another place in the book, he says:

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Let me encourage you to raise your expectations. Expect God's blessing. Expect to increase. Expect promotions. Get up and face each day with enthusiasm knowing that God has great things in store for you. God is saying get ready for more. Make room for increase. Don't be satisfied with what you have.

God wants to make your life easier. God wants to make your life more comfortable. God wants to promote you.

Now, if there was a footnote and at the bottom of the page and it said something like: "By easy, I don't mean in any way more pleasant or less challenging. By easy I mean whatever hardship you may go through, you will not have to face it alone, if you are a follower of Christ. By easy I certainly don't mean financially easier. I mean that you can go through life with a clean conscience. You can have guidance and strength to persevere. You can have the Holy Spirit's leadership. I would say, "Amen."

But when an American reads this book, they are misled. The promise that God intends for our lives to be easier, that God wants to promote us, that God wants us to be comfortable, if that isn't the *opposite* of biblical Christianity, maybe it is not 180° away, but it is 178° away from the New Testament message of what we can expect.

Compare these statements with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship* which is an exposition of the Sermon on the Mount. Here is what Bonhoeffer says in his book:

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When Jesus Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.

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- God wants to make your life easier:
- When Jesus Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.

Do you see a contrast in these two perspectives?

It is almost two different religions. Listen to what the apostle Paul expected from his life and ministry. When the Lord called the apostle Paul into service, he did it with a strong warning. Acts 9.16,

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Ac 9:16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

Paul never anticipated anything but opposition. Listen to what he said to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20.23,

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Ac 20:23 I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.

Our contemporary version of the gospel has no place for enduring persecution. It has no place for Jesus’ words in Matthew 5.10-12. In fact, our contemporary American version of Christianity believes that God is obligated to never let us hurt or suffer.

You know, the early Christians did not suffer a crisis of faith when they suffered persecution. They took Jesus’ words literally. They rejoiced and were glad when they faced opposition. When their backs were ripped open by 39 lashes, they did not ask themselves the question: “How could a loving God permit this?” They did not believe that God was obligated to give them an easy life, or to prevent horrible things from happening to them. They did not ask, “where is God when people hurt me or oppose me for my faith?” Instead, the early Christians did literally what Jesus, their Lord, taught them to do. They rejoiced when they were opposed. Acts 5.41,

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Ac 5:41 The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.

So far from causing them to doubt God, or turn in bitterness from God. Persecution did an amazing thing to early Christians. It actually increased their worship. It increased their praise. It increased their love for Jesus.

Here is what I am saying, friends. If your expectation of the Christian life is the contemporary American version of Christianity, that you are always going to be promoted, that there is always going to be expansion financially, that God would never send you on the down escalator; if your expectation is that God wants to make your life

easy and comfortable, friend, when you hit opposition your faith will collapse like a house of cards.

Listen to me now. Write this down. We in America have lost sight of one central truth that runs through the whole of the Bible and the whole of Christian history. Here is the central truth: Life is supposed to be hard. Do not allow yourself for a minute to submit to the unreal, unbiblical, American version of Christianity that tells you that life is supposed to be pain-free, comfortable, or easy. Write this down: Life is supposed to be hard. And the Christian life is even harder.

Peter puts it plainly when he says in 1 Peter 4.12,

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1Pe 4:12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.

I love the way Gene Peterson puts it in *The Message* version of the Bible. He writes:

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Friends, when life gets really difficult, don't jump to the conclusion that God isn't on the job. Instead, be glad that you are in the very thick of what Christ experienced. This is a spiritual refining process with glory just around the corner.

Let me ask you a question: When you've experienced opposition because of your Christian faith, did it cause you to call God into question? Did you begin to wonder if God was going to be faithful to you? Or did you say, "Praise God! I am a follower of Jesus, who was rejected. This proves I belong to Christ!"

I am so concerned that the American version of Christianity simply does not enable people to stand up under pressure. Either Christians live in denial – my finances are getting better, my health is better – when it's not or we live very fragile lives. Every where I look in the church, I see Christians who are so incredibly fragile, Christians who can't bear any weight, or any difficulty, who collapse at the slightest trial. We have none of the hardiness, none of the endurance of our Christian brothers and sisters around the world or throughout history. We have been sold a spiritual counterfeit concerning what it means to be a follower of Christ.

Expect opposition. Expect difficulty. Expect to be occasionally insulted. Indeed, if these things are not present in your life, you need to take a look at the reality of your faith.

If you are experiencing opposition, how do you get through it joyfully? Jesus says two things to us.

1. You are in great company! V. 12,

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Mt 5:12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Do you face opposition? You have the enormous company of the committed who are embracing you saying, "You are one of us." That's how they've always treated God's people. From the time of Abel in the book of Genesis, to Joseph, who suffered for righteousness, to Moses, who suffered friendly fire, to David, who was persecuted by the mad King Saul, to Elijah, who was hunted and hated by the demonized Queen Jezebel, to Jeremiah, who was thrown into prison, to Zechariah, who was murdered, Daniel who was thrown into a lion's den, and Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, to Jesus and the apostles. Every righteous person has suffered opposition at the hands of the world.

Consider Jesus. It is hard to believe that the Savior we love so much, the person who has been so kind to us, who has covered over our sins, who has not shamed us, the person who regularly receives us, welcomes us, and heals us, and answers our prayers – this wonderful Savior who gives us guidance and wisdom for life, who has blessed us so abundantly – it is hard to believe that this same Jesus who sometimes when we worship him, and sing the song, "What a friend I've found, closer than a brother; I have felt your touch, more intimate than lovers..." – we in the Vineyard sometimes find ourselves weeping – it is hard to believe that this same person who we love so much that it makes us cry sometimes, this Jesus was hated, hunted, slandered, spit at, beaten, and hung on a cross.

What about the first apostles? Eusebius, the early church historian, tells us that every apostle, except John, died a martyr's death. Thomas, it is said, was slain with a dart. Simon, the brother of Jude, was crucified in an Egyptian city. Peter was crucified upside down. He considered himself unworthy to face death in the same manner as Jesus. He asked to be crucified upside down. There is good evidence that he was crucified upside down on Vatican Hill where the present Vatican is built.

Mark, who wrote the Gospel of Mark died in flames. Bartholomew was beaten with sticks, crucified, and then beheaded. James was stoned by a mob. The apostle Paul had his head cut off at the third milestone on the Ostian Way in Rome; I visited the very spot where Paul was beheaded.

Early church history records numerous painful experiences by our Christian brothers and sisters of martyrdom. One of the most famous stories to come to us from the early church concerns the martyrdom of Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna, who himself was a disciple of the apostle John. He has links to the apostles. During one particular wave of persecution, the elderly Polycarp was arrested. Two Roman government officials privately tried to persuade him saying: "What harm is there in saying, 'Lord Caesar' or in sacrificing to the Roman gods? We don't wish to harm you. You are an old man. Just say, 'Lord Caesar' and it will be well with you." But he refused. A Roman governor tried to persuade him. He threatened him. He said, "I'm going to throw you to wild

beasts. Just deny Jesus Christ, or you will die.” And Polycarp said, “80 and 6 years have I served Christ and he never did me any injury. How then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?”

The elder Polycarp was stretched out on a funeral pyre, a pile of logs. They were going to nail him down to it. He said, “You don’t need to. I will just lay here.” And they set him on fire.

You are put on the spot, friend. Your parents issue you an ultimatum: “Turn away from what you are doing, or we will cut you off financially.” You are facing pressure at work: conform; do what we want to do; just be a team player, or you may lose your job. What are you going to do?

During the Reformation, hundreds of men and women were put to death because they broke free from the Roman Catholic church. Many of their stories are recorded in a powerful classic book titled *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* (which is available in our bookstore). In fact, one of our church members reminded me this week that the Ohio State University is one of only four research libraries in the world where early versions of *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* can be found.

We read stories from the Reformation like that of the Oxford martyrs. When Henry VIII died he left three heirs – his son, Edward, and two daughters, Mary and Elizabeth. When King Edward died, the throne passed to his sister, Mary, who became known as Bloody Mary. She was determined to return England to the Roman Catholic faith and she insisted that the best way to deal with heresy and all these Protestants was to burn as many heretics as possible.

Hugh Latimer was famous as a preacher. He was Bishop of Worcester. When Mary came to the throne, he was arrested, tried for heresy, and burned together with his friend Nicholas Ridley. His last words at the stake are well known.

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Be of good cheer, Master Ridley, and play the man, for we shall this day light such a candle in England as I trust by God’s grace shall never be put out.

In the 17th century, John Bunyan, the famous author of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, which may be the most read Christian book in history, next to the Bible, spent a dozen years in prison simply because he refused to stop preaching the gospel.

CS Lewis, the famous Christian writer, the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, was never made a full professor at Oxford because several other professors in the English department hated him simply because he was a committed Christian.

There is an inspiring Christian book about contemporary Christian martyrs called *Jesus Freaks* put out by Voice of the Martyrs. Check the website at www.persecution.com.

Brothers and sisters, if you are sincerely following Christ, you will face opposition.

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Let's pray.

The Most Challenging Beatitude: Blessed Are The Persecuted

Rich Nathan
February 4-5, 2006
Life As It Was Meant To Be
Matthew 5.10-12

I. Who Is Persecuted?

II. Why Are You Persecuted?

A. Bad Reasons

B. Good Reasons

1. Because Of Righteousness (Mt. 5.10)

2. Because Of Christ (Mt. 5.11)

C. Friendly Fire

III. What Do You Expect In Life?

A. The Contemporary Version Of Christianity

B. The Biblical Version Of Christianity

IV. How Do You Face Opposition?

A. Joining The Company Of the Committed

1. Jesus

2. The Apostles

3. The Early Church

4. The Reformation

5. The 19th Century

6. The Contemporary Church

B. Rejoice In The Reward Of The Faithful (Mt. 5.12)