

Welcome and Notices

Call To Worship and Opening Prayer

10 You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, 11 persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. 12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted... 2 Timothy 3: 10 – 12 (NIV)

Let us pray.

Give us, O God, a vision of your glory, that we may worship you in spirit and in truth, and offer the praise of glad and thankful hearts; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Confession

Lord Jesus, You came into the world to save sinners:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

We have brought sorrow and hurt to You, to others and to ourselves:

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

You give Yourself to heal and renew us, and to bring us strength:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Know that your sins are forgiven through Jesus Christ, our Saviour, and rejoice in his goodness and grace.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

Song 10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=reHcKkKPPos>

Bless the Lord oh my soul
Oh my soul
Worship His Holy name
Sing like never before
Oh my soul
I'll worship Your Holy name

The sun comes up
It's a new day dawning
It's time to sing Your song again
Whatever may pass
And whatever lies before me
Let me be singing
When the evening comes

Bless the Lord oh my soul
Oh my soul
Worship His Holy name
Sing like never before
Oh my soul
I'll worship Your Holy name

You're rich in love
And You're slow to anger
Your name is great
And Your heart is kind
For all Your goodness
I will keep on singing
Ten thousand reasons
For my heart to find

Bless the Lord oh my soul
Oh my soul
Worship His Holy name
Sing like never before
Oh my soul
I'll worship Your Holy name
Bless You Lord

And on that day
When my strength is failing
The end draws near
And my time has come
Still my soul will
Sing Your praise unending
Ten thousand years
And then forevermore

Forevermore

Bless the Lord oh my soul
Oh my soul
Worship His Holy name
Sing like never before
Oh my soul
I'll worship Your Holy name

Bless the Lord oh my soul
Oh my soul
Worship His Holy name
Sing like never before
Oh my soul
I'll worship Your Holy name
Yes I'll worship Your Holy name
I'll worship Your Holy name

Sing like never before
Oh my soul
I'll worship Your Holy name
Jesus I will worship Your Holy name
Worship Your Holy name

The Offertory Prayer

God of life, saviour of the poor, receive with this money gratitude for your goodness, penitence for our pride and dedication to your service in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Reading: Matthew 5: 11 – 12

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

This is the Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Reflection

Florence Chadwick was the first woman ever to swim the difficult and cold 21 mile stretch

of water between Catalina Island, off the west coast of North America, and the Californian coast. She had failed on her first attempt because of poor vision. After 15 hours and 55 minutes of numbing cold she asked to be taken out of the water. A heavy fog blanketed the area and obscured her vision of the land, which stood only one mile away. She said afterwards, "If only I could have seen the shore, I could have made it." She was defeated because she lost sight of her goal. The fog did not hinder her physically, but psychologically it sapped her of her strength and courage to go on by robbing her of the vision of her goal.

Jesus, the creator of the mind, is naturally the master psychologist. He knows how important vision is to strength, courage, and happiness. He knew that the fog of persecution that would settle around His disciples would lead to doubt, confusion, and discouragement. He knew that these things blind Christians and rob them of the vision of their goal, and can defeat them, and cause them to lose the blessedness of all the other beatitudes. Therefore, in this last beatitude, Jesus provides His disciples with a defensive weapon to penetrate the fog of persecution.

He promises great reward in heaven to those who will press on in the dark, knowing the light is still shining beyond.

In his short novel, *Typhoon*, Joseph Conrad tells the story of a ship's captain who, instead of making a U-turn, obstinately leads his steamer into a typhoon in the Pacific Ocean, refusing to turn back. As great waves pound the ship, he shouts to the first mate, "Don't you be put out by anything! Keep her facing it! Facing it, always facing it -- that's the way to get through -- face it! That's enough for any man. Keep a cool head and face it."

This is what Jesus is saying to His disciples. The storm of persecution is coming. If they try and turn back to escape it, they lose all. Their victory and happiness depends on their keeping a cool head and facing it. It is hard to keep cool in the fires of affliction, however. How many of us could face the cruelty of Nero, who put Christian men and women in sacks, covered them with oil, and set them up on poles in his garden; then lit them as living torches to light up his garden at night. Yet this is what Jesus calls His disciples to face.

This is the burden of the cross. In his poem *The Present Crisis*, John Russell Lowell wrote, "By the light of burning heretics Christ's bleeding feet I track, Toiling up new Calvaries with the cross that turns not back,"

Blessedness is pressing on, whatever the cost, with your eyes upon Him who bore the cross for you. Jesus says, happy are those who take following me seriously enough to bear the burden of the cross. Take up the cross and follow me Jesus said, and His demand is still the same today, and the promise is still the same: that those who suffer with Christ shall also reign with Him.

This beatitude must have been shocking to those who first heard it. They were expecting honour and Jesus offers them hostility. You would naturally think that those who developed the qualities of character in these beatitudes would be loved by all. They would be so pleasant and helpful in society that their friendship and presence would be treasured, you would think. One of the unfortunate paradoxes of life, however, is the fact that the best people are often the most despised.

Jesus, who alone embodied all of these beatitudes perfectly, was crucified. Excessive goodness provokes opposition because it makes the conscience of evil men burn with shame and guilt. Too much light clashes with

darkness, and holiness clashes with evil, and so the Christian is under constant pressure to conform to the world so as not to rock the boat and stir up opposition.

Some of the other beatitudes have been difficult to grasp, but this last one is the crowning paradox of them all. It is equivalent to Jesus saying His burden is light. How can a burden be light? If it is light it is not a burden, is it? Yet Jesus calls us to take up the burden of the cross which is a very costly act, yet one which leads to much joy and happiness.

What could be more paradoxical than?

- A crushing burden that lifts you to the skies?
- Being exceedingly glad when you are hated and despised?

Jesus knew this was a hard statement to believe and understand. That is why He states it twice. It is so incredible. All the other beatitudes are in one verse each, but this one takes three verses to state – vv10, 11 and 12. It is both the hardest to grasp, and the one offering the fullest reward for time and eternity.

It is hard to grasp because it contradicts our feelings and thinking. We feel that as Christians in the UK we are more blessed than any Christians ever, because we live in a tolerant society where we are free to worship as we please without penalty or interference. We feel so sorry for those Christians in North Korea, Russia, China and Pakistan – to name just a few of those countries where persecution is rife -- who have to suffer so severely for their faith, and we pray for them to be able to have the blessings we have. Yet, this beatitude would lead to us to believe they are the blessed ones. They are the gloriously happy Christians, and it is we who have the crumbs of blessedness.

This is very hard to believe, and surely there must be some mistake we feel. Yet if we look at the other side of the coin that Luke gives us, it points to the same conclusion. In Luke 6:26 Jesus says, " Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets." If everyone likes us and praises us as such wonderful people, it may be because we never disturbed them, but only tickle their ears and make them feel comfortable in their sins, like the false prophets. But if we are attacked and slandered, we show ourselves loyal to Christ. Yet, Paul says we are to live peaceably with all men as much as lies within us (Romans 12:18).

Let's be honest and admit that this is confusing. Sometimes I think we feel we would be better off if Jesus had never explained to us how to be blessed! Happiness is hard to understand, and how to gain it is a problem, but after Jesus explains how to do it, it seems harder to grasp than ever. This is because some truths are not a matter of logic, but of life. You cannot analyse this beatitude and demonstrate the truth of it on paper. It can only be proven in life and experience.

It calls for the courage to step out and take a risk for Christ. As long as we play it safe and sit in silence so we don't rock the boat, we can never know the joy of bearing the burden of the cross. We must speak out against the sin and injustice in our society. We need to renounce sin in ourselves, and denounce it in others, and take the consequences.

A rugby referee was once asked about a certain player in the game he had refereed. "I can only say this, I have never seen him pulled out from the bottom of a scrum. I often have found him on top of a pile of players, where he had jumped after the man with the ball

had been stopped by another player. But he was never the first to make the tackle."

So many of us are like this in the game of life. We jump on the band wagon if someone else takes a stand and bears the burden of the impact, but we are never the first to make the tackle. The result is we miss much of the joy, excitement, and adventure of bearing the cross.

Let's just take a moment to look at two important points of this final beatitude.

Firstly – The requirement

In verse 10 and 11, Jesus qualifies His statement by saying that persecution must be for righteousness sake, and for His sake, and the evil slander must be false. In other words, any suffering that you must endure because you are a trouble-maker, or because you rub people up the wrong way by an obnoxious attitude and actions, does not increase your happiness. The people of God through the centuries suffered much opposition and persecution, not because of their righteousness, but because of their lack of it. Sometimes persecution is the judgment of God on His people for their sin and indifference.

It is a mistake to assume that persecution is a blessing in itself, or proof of one's righteousness. Many of the false cults faced the same persecution in Rome as did the Christians. Jesus is saying that only those who meet the requirement can reap the benefits of this beatitude. The suffering must be because the persecutor hates the righteousness of the persecuted and is opposed to Jesus Christ. The accusation must be false.

For example, in the early church Christians were charged with cannibalism because of the words said at communion about eating of

the body and drinking the blood of Christ. They were charged with immorality because they called their meal together a love feast. Their practice of giving a kiss of peace did not help clarify things at all, and so all manner of evil was spoken against them, but falsely in ignorance, or maliciously in hatred, and, therefore, they were blessed.

[Next, we see the response](#)

Jesus does not say if you are persecuted, reviled, and slandered, you should grin and bear it. Jesus tells us we should rejoice and be glad. But then, who but a crazy person can rejoice and be glad when they are hated and opposed? This is contrary to our very nature. We love to be loved, approved, and accepted. Nothing hurts worse than to be falsely slandered and rejected for our very goodness. Yet Jesus says this is to be our response. Is it possible?

Well, we don't have to speculate. History is full of testimonies concerning the joy of bearing the burden of the cross. In Acts 5:41 we read that, after Peter and John were beaten, "they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name." Paul and Silas sang songs at midnight while in prison (Acts 16:25). Thousands of Christians have gone to their death singing praises to God. The records are full of men and women experiencing the paradox of joy in suffering.

John Chrysostom, the great preacher in the early church who Mike mentioned in his reflection last week, said this, "Were any to ask whether he should place me on high with the angels, or with St. Paul in his bonds, I would choose the prison ... I count not St. Paul so happy because he was caught up into paradise, as because he was cast into the dungeon."

To grasp the blessedness that can be ours in bearing the cross, we must see Jesus as a double Saviour. He saved us from our sins on the cross, but He will also save us from the consequences of sin in the future, and often in the present as well. We need to look back to the cross and His salvation there to gain the courage we need to bear the cross, but we need to look ahead to the victory and reward of the future to sustain us when the going gets tough.

And Jesus is also a dual-Saviour. The salvation He purchased for us on the cross does not save us from life's trials and persecution. Often Christians must suffer just because they trust in the cross and the Christ of the cross. This is the burden of the cross, but Jesus will save us from this also, and the reward will be so great for those who are faithful under the burden of the cross. Happiness is not found in what you have, but in what you hope for. It is the expectation of receiving God's best that gives life meaning when circumstances are far from happy.

Being loyal to Christ when it does not pay is the real test. Many of us have never yet been put to this test. We need to ask ourselves honestly: Is Christ so precious to me I would stand loyal against an opposing society?

Samuel Shoemaker, the priest who helped to form Alcoholics Anonymous, was on a tour of Westminster Abbey when he heard a tourist say to the guide, "This place really thrills me", to which the guide – who had grown old and grey in conducting innumerable parties around the Abbey – replied "Yes madam, but you can't thrill for 30 years." We can sympathise with the guide, for we know it is true that the thrill of life's wonders do wear thin.

But it is possible to keep the thrills of life alive, by keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, and

our minds filled with the promise of his reward. Take your eyes off Him, and, like Peter, you begin to sink in the stormy seas of life's troubles. To stay on top and be blessedly happy you must keep your eye on Him in all circumstances.

The psychologist William H. Sheldon said, "Happiness is essentially a state of going somewhere, wholeheartedly, one-directionally, without regret or reservation." How many times have you said, "I'll be happy if only I had more of this, or lived there, or had that job, or better health, etc." All of us can think of changes for the better that would make us happy, but who would ever think of saying, "I would be happier if I could suffer this, be hated for that, reviled and despised for my faith."

Anyone talking that way would be regarded as being sick and probably be shunned rather than persecuted. Obviously, Jesus is not picturing the ideal life here. He is simply facing the reality He knows will be a part of history, and He is offering His followers a special bonus if they will bear the burden of the cross, no matter how heavy it gets.

We are not to look for persecution, or promote it, but rather avoid it if we can -- but if it comes, we are to be ready to pay the price. There's a true story told about a man who was placed by his church to head a street mission in the meanest and most deprived part of a city. It was grindingly hard work, filled with frustrations and set backs. One day a friend came to visit and found him dejected and exhausted by yet another failed initiative. The friend said, "Look, you don't have to be here, wearing yourself out in this dreadful place. Why don't you just walk away?" And he replied, "You have no idea how often I have thought about doing that -- but there's a

strange loving man on a cross who keeps me here."

It's stories like this that show us that this paradoxical beatitude can be realised in life, and the cross can be borne in joy. It is a burden that is light, as Jesus said. As we remember again the cross Jesus bore for our sin, let us renew our commitment to Him, and pray for the courage to stand and speak out for Him whatever the cost.

Let us pray for the courage to take up the burden of the cross.

In Jesus' name, **Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Loving father we pray:

For all world leaders that they may always respond to the needs of the poor, hungry and vulnerable in their societies. That they lead with justice and fairness for all.

For the church that through the Holy Spirit, that we and by us the church will know your will and share your gospel of light and grace with those around us.

For those who hunger and thirst for meaning in their lives, for those who struggle because of the pandemic and the lockdowns. That their needs might be met through turning to you.

We pray for those who are celebrating birthdays, weddings and anniversaries that through the celebrations they experience the joy and happiness of the grace you brought us.

For those known to us who are unwell we ask for your healing power to be upon them. We think of Roger and Carol, of Roger and Sheila and in the silence lift before you others know to us.

For those who grieve may they experience your comfort, strength, and compassion directly and through those around them.

For those who are persecuted and lied about for righteousness sake we ask your protection. For those who stand up for belief in Jesus Christ comfort, strengthen and protect them. Through their example may your love and light be shown in this world through the lives of those who follow you.

We lift these and all our prayers to you, O God, confident in the promise of your saving love; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Song: You raise me up (Josh Groban)

<https://youtu.be/uyEokxi2hWY>

When I am down and, oh my soul, so weary
When troubles come and my heart burdened be
Then, I am still and wait here in the silence
Until You come and sit awhile with me.

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders
You raise me up to more than I can be

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders
You raise me up to more than I can be.

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You raise me up to more than I can be.

The Peace

Our Lord Jesus Christ said to the apostles:
'I leave you peace, my peace I give to you.'
The peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

The Act of Holy Communion

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is indeed right, always and everywhere, to give thanks to you, the true and living God. Endless is your mercy and eternal is your reign.

All creation rejoices in your radiant splendour. You made a covenant with your people and declared your purpose of justice and love. When all things were ready, you sent your Son to be our Saviour.

In words and deeds, he proclaimed your kingdom, and obeyed your will even to death on the cross.

Through his mighty resurrection he overcame sin and death to set the whole creation free. Therefore, with saints and angels and with all the choirs of heaven, we join in the song of eternal praise.

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

We praise you, Father, that on the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took

bread and gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying,
'Take and eat. This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

After supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying,
'This cup is the new covenant of my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this in remembrance of me.'

As often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Therefore, gracious God, with this bread and this cup we remember that our Lord offered his life for us. Believing the witness of his resurrection and ascension, we look for his coming in glory, and our sharing in his great and promised feast.

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Send now, we pray, your Holy Spirit, that these gifts of bread and wine may be for us the body and blood of Christ and that we may live to your praise and glory with all your saints in light.

Amen. Come, Holy Spirit.

Join our prayers and the prayers of all your people on earth and in heaven with the intercession of Christ, our great high priest, **through whom, with whom, and in whom, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all worship and honour are yours, almighty God and Father, for ever and ever. Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Distribution of the Bread and Wine

The bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.

Christ is the Bread of life.

The cup we take is a sharing in the blood of Christ.

Christ is the true Vine.

If you require a gluten free wafer, please ask.

Please use this time for silent prayer and reflection.

Prayer After Communion

Let us pray.

We praise you, God, for the bread of heaven and the cup of salvation which you give for the life of the world.

With this food for our journey bring us with your saints to the feast of your glory. Amen.

Closing song: Amazing grace (My chains are gone)

<https://youtu.be/qXyFgXeGvmc>

Amazing grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found
Was blind, but now I see

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed

My chains are gone, I've been set free
My God, my Saviour has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy reigns
Unending love
Amazing grace

The Lord has promised good to me
His word my hope secures
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures

My chains are gone, I've been set free
My God, my Saviour has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy reigns
Unending love
Amazing grace

My chains are gone, I've been set free
My God, my Saviour has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy reigns
Unending love
Amazing grace

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow
The sun forbear to shine
But God who called me here below
Will be forever mine, will be forever mine
You are forever mine

Closing Prayer and Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make his face to shine on you and be
gracious to you;
The Lord look on you with kindness and give
you peace.
Amen.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.