**Sunday 20th November 2016 Message**

**Don’t settle for less.**

**Introduction**

Every one of you here this morning has been formed in their mother’s womb, has a God given plan for their life. It is amazing that that plan includes having the character of Christ as encapsulated in the beatitudes, and access to all the associated blessings. Just think on these verses

***Jeremiah 29:11-12 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. NIV***

***Psalm 139 says, "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (verse 16, NIV).***

***Jer 1:5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations." NKJV***

Of course, God also gives you the choice, as to whether you agree to follow Him down all the paths He has set before you (but He has all that covered).

When we obey His directions we live a truly blessed life, and we have greater confidence in seeking God for everything we need to fulfil the call on our life.

A problem we see in many Christians is that they have settled for less than God has promised because they have lost hope or become disheartened along their journey of faith.

Today we approach the blessing that awaits those who attain the like of Christ, and it could be off putting and cause you to hold back from pursuing all that God has for you.

**Blessed are you when**

***Matthew 5:10-12*** **Slide** or as **Slide *Luke 6:22***

The thought of persecution for many would make us forget to read on to the blessing of all that is in the kingdom of heaven becoming legally your entitlement.

Yet we cannot ignore the fact persecution is one of the hallmarks of a Christian persuing after God, none of us are called to go deliberately out of our way to be persecuted, but we should never be surprised when we are.

**Slide**

***1 Peter 4:12*** do not be surprised at the fiery trial that comes upon you

***2 Timothy 3:12*** All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

***John 15:20*** A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me they will persecute you.

**Slide** Persecuted – to be harassed, by circumstances, be reviled by word, by hand physical.

From the day you were saved you have been harassed by the devil. He is the father of all harassers because he does not want you to become like Christ. He is so determined to prevent that, that he throws everything possible at you to distract you from your calling, and I do not mean just temptation to wilfully sin. Just think of the difficult circumstances you face, the heartaches, the grief, the exhaustion, the sicknesses. All of these are part of his tactic to distract you, but God will use all of them to strengthen your resolve if you work with Him.

The enemy and the world hates the light of the gospel because they are living in darkness so do not be surprised at what is thrown back in your face.

On the path to sanctification you will be harassed by the enemy, the world, even your family so why bother?

Do not expect to be thanked for living a godly life in your spheres of influence. You will be treated with suspicion at the best, with persecution most likely.

You will be persecuted for righteousness sake, but you are blessed with the kingdom of heaven. You will be honoured amongst all those who by faith pursued righteousness yet suffered persecution from the beginning to the end of the Bible you can see it happening.

**Slide** Persecution is foretold and is normal to all godly people. From the time Abel was considered righteous, Cain whose deeds were evil killed his brother Abel. There is a pattern of persecution and suffering right throughout scripture.

Joseph was persecuted by his brothers, and in Egypt cast into prison, for righteousness sake.

 Moses was reviled, insulted throughout his leadership

 Samuel was rejected

 Elijah was despised and persecuted

 Nehemiah was oppressed and defamed

 Jesus was crucified – yet He brought the kingdom of heaven to earth

 Stephen was stoned

 Peter was put into prison

 James was beheaded

 Paul was beaten, put in chains, and put in prison

So it goes on even today and till the end of time. You may not have suffered physical persecution but I am sure you will have been harassed, reviled and rejected because of your righteous living.

I do not believe God wants us this morning to focus on the prospect of being persecuted, but to focus on not allowing anything to cause us to settle for less than the best that God has for us. So today I want us to look at the beatitudes in a similar way to the way many preachers would look at having faith for healing, prosperity and other feel good factors.

The beatitudes are a high calling with great blessings. I am moving from a **Slide** ladder to a mountain analogy today. **Slide**

Don’t be passive in your pursuit of the dream of being able to achieve all that is laid down in the beatitudes with all the associated blessings. Do not give up over the size of the mountain. Do not sit down and wait for God to do it in you, keep hope and go.

**Aims, Limits & Possibilities – the call to time the ALPs**

We are called to live at peace, and be peacemakers in the midst of pressure/harassment. To be able to do so we have to know that God can work everything out for good and to accept that truth not with a sigh of resignation but with a song of hope.

We are called to be pure in heart, and yet we could be tempted to give up when we fail over and over, again. The aim is to be pure in heart, God knows our limits, yet He has said it is possible so keep on aiming at the possibilities and do not give up when you fail. A father knows his child will be able to ride a bike, but the child could give up every time they fell off, but the Father puts the child back on and points to the possibility.

**Slide** ***Hebrews 11:1*** Faith is the assurance of things **hoped** for.

Notice faith is secondary to hope. People stop pursuing faith when they have lost hope. People stop reading the word, hearing the word, to stir faith, when they have lost hope of receiving the things that God has promised as possible.

***Genesis 17.*** Why did Abraham have faith for a child in old age, because he did not lose hope in Gods promise. Yes he tried to work it out in his own way with Hagar. He knew it was impossible for two old people to have a child, nobody else around him was having children at their age, all the circumstances were against him. God stirred a faith in him because the desire of any man, the hope of any man, was to have descendants to inherit what he had worked for. God gave Abraham three months to get pregnant and nine months to deliver the promise of God, in a year from now. No pressure old man.

**Slide** If you do not have any hope, faith does not have a job.

When faith has nothing to do you are not hungry for the word. You can see people who have lost hope because they are not hungry for God.

God responds to the hope He has placed in you, by giving you words to stir your faith and encourage you to climb the mountain to the possibility. Hope is the expected end, but does not know what the process that God has for it become a reality.

If you have a hope from God for a building you do not know what the process is to achieve the hope that God has placed in you. You may have to change route to the end goal, change methods, change timescale, that does not mean you have lost hope, it means you are working out your faith to achieve the end goal. People who lose hope, lose faith, and settle for less than what God has said is possible. I use the analogy of hope and faith for a building as an example. You need hope first and then faith by hearing the word in order to pursue the character of Christ, do not settle for less than Christ has said is available.

In the process of sanctification do not settle for one wash and brush up in the process, get up with renewed hope and pursue to the possibility.

You need to keep stirring your faith, by reading, hearing and devouring the word of God.

You can be encouraged by little gains in your pursuit of the beatitudes, but never be satisfied. You want to be able to point at marvellous trophies of faith. You are meant to show that He who is in you is greater than he who is against you.

How long have you been fishing? No Jesus said have you caught anything? Have you achieved what you went out for?

Persecution comes in many forms, the enemy hates you, the darkness in mankind wants to quench the light, the spirit of the world does not want you to become like Jesu, but you were chosen by God to be His representative and He wants you to succeed.

**Five lessons on entering your destiny we can learn from Abraham in Genesis 17**

1. Covenant before circumcision
2. Change your name when you change your game
3. Connections matter – activities & people
4. Circumstances do not matter
5. Every Conqueror has complications

**Covenant before circumcision** – circumcision is symbolic of cutting away the flesh that is not essential to be productive. If your flesh is not helping you produce the blessings of the beatitudes, cut it off. Covenant comes before circumcision. God has made a covenant with you before your flesh has been removed. You have been saved so you can get right. The possibilities of the beatitudes were made possible by the hope of Christ in you to stir faith to achieve all that Christ has said is possible.

**Change your name when you change your game** – God changed Abrahams identity because He was changing his game. Are you still calling yourself by your old self, when He has changed your identity in Christ. When you believe you have been changed you line up with who you are. Hello I am so and so, I have issues, I have baggage, this is my identity. That shows you believe you cannot be changed. God changed Abram and Sarais name because they were in a new game. Do not confuse people as to who you are by still saying you have a problem. Sarai could not be secretly pregnant what was inside eventually changed what was on the outside. Are you pregnant with a promise of God? Is the change showing yet.

The truth is we should be able to see who you are in Christ by the way you live. Prophets call you into your identity when you have not yet stepped up to the call of Christ on your life.

Remember all of the characteristics listed in the beatitudes with the associated blessings are there for every person called of God into relationship.

**Connections Matter** – Abram was told to circumcise everyone in his household. Cut off those around you which are in rebellion to your destiny. Not only people but activities that you are connected too which are a distraction. You will be exhausted by being connected to people and activities that are not in line with your destiny. A house divided against itself will not stand. Keep all your activities interrelated to your vision. Divisive – Di-vision Di-straction. What is ruining your pursuit of purity, cut it off.

What/who is disturbing your peace – cut it off.

What is hindering your meekness (being under the hand of God) – cut it off.

What is stopping you being hungry for righteousness, have you lost hope because of how you are living, change your lifestyle, cut yourself off from the negative influences.

What activities are you involved in that are destroying your purity of heart – stop it, cut it off.

Abraham received his promise when he was past his reproduction age. You may think you have received the promises of blessings in the beatitudes when it is too late, it is never too late.

**Circumstances do not matter** – don’t keep telling God and others that achieving what He has promised is impossible because of the mountain of problems in your life. When God opens a door circumstances do not matter. Temptations, persecutions, circumstances do not change the promises of God.

You may apply that to your healing but do you apply it to the change God has purposed in your character.

You might apply that thinking to your lack of finances or resources to do what God is asking you to do, but do you apply the same confidence or lack thereof to being like Christ.

**Ishmael represents the spirit of making do.** Do not settle on what you can achieve in your strength, at your age – pursue the possibility. He can do things exceedingly above all that you could ever think ***Ephesians 3:20***. He has made it possible by the help of the Spirit within you to be exceedingly great peacemaker than you think, exceedingly more pure in heart than you think, exceedingly more meek, exceedingly more merciful to those who come against you.

**Every conqueror has complications**. Ishmael was Abrahams complication but that did not mean God could not take Abraham to his destiny through Isaac. God knew about Ishmael but God can deal with the complications you have created in your life. In fact Abraham loved Ishmael and wanted God to have a plan for Ishmael his complication. You can conquer even if you have created complications.

**Concluding Comments**

Do not lose hope because of the challenges you face including being harassed.

If He has said it, it is possible, so do not settle for less than He has said.