

Session 8: Persecuted for Righteousness: Rejoice and Be Glad

Matthew 5:10-16

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group closes the frame (the eighth beatitude returns to the first's promise), stands in the prophets' company, receives the study's great reveal (the Beatitudes are the portrait of Christ himself, CCC 1717), and is commissioned as salt and light.

Catholic Touchstone. CCC 1717: the Beatitudes depict the countenance of Jesus Christ. CCC 2473: martyrdom is the supreme witness to the truth of the faith.

What You Need to Know

The eighth beatitude closes the frame the group found in Session 1: "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," the identical present-tense promise as 5:3, sealing the eight as one composition that begins and ends with the kingdom. Then verses 11-12 do two things at once: they turn to direct address ("Blessed are YOU when men revile you and persecute you") and they escalate to the imperative that titles this study: "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you." That last clause is an astonishing promotion: to be persecuted for Jesus' sake is to be filed in the prophets' personnel records. Note also the quiet Christological bombshell: 5:10 says "for righteousness' sake" and 5:11 says "on my account." Jesus quietly aligns the two, an implicit Christological claim of staggering size: righteousness, in this sermon, has his face.

Precision matters pastorally: the beatitude blesses those persecuted FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS, not for obnoxiousness. Christians who are merely rude and then claim persecution empty the beatitude; Peter draws the line himself: suffer for righteousness' sake and answer with gentleness and reverence (1 Peter 3:14-17), but never suffer as a wrongdoer or a mischief-maker (1 Peter 4:15-16). The genuine article, meanwhile, is not a museum piece: by widely cited (though contested) estimates, and in St. John Paul II's own telling, the twentieth century was a century of martyrs on a scale hard to parallel, and quiet costs (mockery, career friction, family contempt) are the ordinary tax believers in this room have already paid. Both must be named: no persecution complex, no naivety.

TONIGHT IS THE REVEAL. The Face of Christ thread, logged silently since Session 1, comes into the open at Build 4, and the group should experience it as discovery, not lecture: they assemble the portrait themselves from texts they have already read, then the leader reads CCC 1717 aloud: the Beatitudes depict the countenance of Jesus Christ. Before the Beatitudes are a program they are a portrait (CCC 1717 holds both: they depict Christ's countenance AND express our vocation), and the program is: become what you are looking at. This is the study's summit moment; give it room, and let silence do its work before anyone speaks.

Then the commissioning. The sermon itself refuses to end at blessing: "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world." Indicatives, not imperatives: Jesus does not say become salt; he says you ARE, so do not go flat, and do not hide. The study ends by sending: the final ritual (see Thread Watch) has each participant name their beatitude of the month, and the group walks down the mountain.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

The prophets' file, which 5:12 opens: Jeremiah beaten and put in the stocks (Jeremiah 20:1-2) and lamenting the word that made him "a laughingstock all the day" (20:7-8); Zechariah the priest's son stoned in the temple court (2 Chronicles 24:20-21), traditionally identified with the Zechariah of Matthew 23:35 (Matthew's "son of Barachiah" patronymic is a well-known crux the Church has not settled), as Jesus indicts a prophet-killing

history: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets" (23:37). The pattern was set long before Calvary: the word of God draws fire.

Isaiah 61 completes the circle it opened in Session 2: the Anointed One brings good tidings to the afflicted, and (the typological application is ours) the reviled and slandered of the final beatitude stand among Isaiah's afflicted, heirs of the same consolation: garland for ashes, the oil of gladness, the year of the LORD's favor. The root system planted across eight sessions is one tree.

Voices of the Church

ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH · LETTER TO THE ROMANS 4 (ROBERTS-DONALDSON TRANSLATION)

"I am the wheat of God, and let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ." St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, wrote these words to the church in Rome, traditionally around the year 107, while being transported under guard to his execution, begging the Roman Christians not to intervene. A man within living memory of the apostles read his own martyrdom through the Eucharist: his death, a becoming-bread.

Application (ours, not the saint's): Ignatius took "rejoice and be glad" at face value, under the only circumstances that fully test it.

TERTULLIAN · APOLOGY, CHAPTER 50

"The blood of Christians is seed." Tertullian, the fiery North African writer of the early Church (an early Christian author the Church reads with profit, though he is not among the canonized saints), closed his defense of Christianity to Rome's magistrates with this taunt: kill us and we multiply. History gave his claim real weight: the martyrs' witness became one of the great engines (not the only one) of the Church's growth inside the empire that killed them.

The eighth beatitude's promise has receipts: the kingdom really did belong to the persecuted.

ST. MAXIMILIAN KOLBE · HIS LIFE; AUSCHWITZ, 1941

In the summer of 1941 at Auschwitz, after an escape, the camp selected ten men to die by starvation. When one of them, Franciszek Gajowniczek, cried out for his wife and children, a Polish Franciscan priest, St. Maximilian Kolbe, stepped forward and asked to take his place. He led the condemned in prayer and hymns from the starvation bunker for two weeks and was finally killed by lethal injection on August 14, 1941. Gajowniczek survived the war and was present in Rome when Kolbe was canonized.

The century so often called a century of martyrs was also among the brightest with this beatitude. Kolbe did not merely endure his persecutors; inside the machinery of hatred, he out-loved it.

Catechism Connection · CCC 1716-1717 (the reveal), 1967, 2473; on the Church and the cross, 769

CCC 1716 sets the Beatitudes at the heart of Jesus' preaching. CCC 1717, read aloud at the reveal: the Beatitudes depict the countenance of Jesus Christ and portray his charity; they express the vocation of the faithful; they are the paradoxical promises that sustain hope in tribulation. CCC 1967: the Law of the Gospel fulfills the promises, and the Beatitudes carry them to the kingdom of heaven. CCC 2473 defines martyrdom as the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: a witness borne even unto death. CCC 769 (leader background): the Church will enter the glory of the kingdom only through the final Passover, following her Lord; the Church advances through persecution and consolation together.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

FACE OF CHRIST: RESOLVES TONIGHT at Build 4. Bring your log from all seven sessions in case the group stalls: became poor (2 Corinthians 8:9; Matthew 8:20), wept (John 11:35), gentle and lowly (Matthew 11:29), hungered for the Father's will (John 4:34; with Matthew 4:2 and John 19:28 as its lived icon), sat at table with sinners and forgave executioners (Matthew 9:10-13; Luke 23:34), pure and guileless (1 Peter 2:22; John 8:29), is our peace by the blood of his cross (Ephesians 2:14; Colossians 1:20), persecuted from Matthew 2 to the cross. Let THEM assemble it; you hold the net.

LADDER: resolves. St. Gregory of Nyssa's eight homilies climb all the way through the eighth beatitude: his ascent does not stop at the vision but continues through peacemaking and persecution. Name the shape aloud tonight (the framing is this study's): the promise of seeing God crowns the climb, and the last steps send the climber into the world; the top of the Beatitudes turns out to be a sending.

SEALED GUESS (final voluntary use): in the closing ritual, offer participants their Session 1 slips back one last time. Invitation, never pressure: "Would anyone like to read their old definition of happiness and say what they would write tonight?" Then each participant states their beatitude of the month (see Send 2). Collect nothing; the slips go home with their authors.

Session Goals

1. Participants identify the closed frame (5:3 / 5:10) and the significance of "for righteousness' sake" = "on my account".
2. Participants can distinguish persecution for righteousness from persecution for obnoxiousness (1 Peter 3:14-16).
3. The Face of Christ reveal lands as the group's own discovery, sealed by CCC 1717.
4. Each participant leaves commissioned: salt and light named, a beatitude of the month chosen aloud.

Time Note

90 minutes, with hard timeboxes: the reveal (Build 4) must begin by minute 55 and the commissioning (Build 5) by minute 75; protect 12 minutes for the reveal itself. Win 8, Read 5, Builds 1-3 done by minute 50, reveal 12, Builds 5-6 15, Steelman 8, Send + closing ritual 12. Pre-chosen cuts, in order: the Dig Deeper, Build 2's second Jeremiah reading, then compress the steelman to its first and last movements. The reveal and the closing ritual are untouchable. If the room still runs long, salt and light can become a spoken Send coda; leaders wanting the full weight of both may split this into two meetings.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, you finished the Beatitudes with a command to rejoice under fire, and then you obeyed it all the way to the cross. Tonight, finish what you began in us on the first night. Show us your face; then send us down the mountain. Amen.

Win: Opening the Circle

Win 1. Have you ever paid a real cost, however small, for doing the right thing or for being a Christian? What did it cost, and what did it feel like afterward?

Win 2. Why do you think goodness sometimes provokes hostility rather than admiration?

Build: Into the Text

Build 1. Read Matthew 5:10 and compare its promise, word for word, with 5:3. What did we predict about this in Session 1, and what does the completed frame mean?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Identical, present tense: "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The *inclusio* the group spotted on night one closes: the eight Beatitudes are one composition, bracketed by the kingdom, and it belongs NOW to the emptied (5:3) and the persecuted (5:10): the two conditions the world pities most. The kingdom is the first word, the last word, and the point.

Build 2. Read 5:11-12 slowly. Find every shift from verse 10: person, tense, and one quiet substitution between "for righteousness' sake" (v.10) and the phrase in v.11. What does the substitution claim?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Third person becomes second ("blessed are YOU"); description becomes command ("Rejoice and be glad"); and "for righteousness' sake" becomes "on my account." Jesus swaps himself in for righteousness without comment: to suffer for the right is to suffer for HIM; the wider New Testament will say why: righteousness is fulfilled personally in Christ. It is one of the sermon's most staggering implicit claims, and it sets up tonight's reveal.

Build 3. DISCOVERY. "For so men persecuted the prophets who were before you." Open the file: read Jeremiah 20:1-2 and 20:7-9, then 2 Chronicles 24:20-21, then Matthew 23:35, 37. What company does verse 12 enroll you in, and why does the word of God draw fire?

Leader cue: Live discovery: the prophets' personnel file. Let them feel the promotion in being added to it.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Jeremiah beaten and put in the stocks, made a daily laughingstock by the word he could not hold in; Zechariah stoned in the temple court; and Jesus himself naming the pattern over Jerusalem, the city "killing the prophets." The word of God draws fire because it tells the truth to power and to comfort, and both bite back. Verse 12's logic: persecution for Jesus' sake is not a malfunction of discipleship; it is the prophets' job description, and the pay grade ("your reward is great in heaven") matches.

Build 4. THE REVEAL. One final discovery, the one we have been building for seven weeks. Around the circle, one beatitude each: from the texts THIS STUDY has already read, show that Jesus himself lived that beatitude. Then the leader reads CCC 1717 aloud.

Leader cue: The Face of Christ resolves. Assign each participant a beatitude; let them mine their memories and Take-Homes; supply from the leader log only what they cannot find. Then read CCC 1717, then hold silence before Build 5.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The portrait, from texts already on the table: poor in spirit: though rich, he became poor (2 Corinthians 8:9), nowhere to lay his head (Matthew 8:20). Mourning: Jesus wept (John 11:35). Meek: gentle and lowly in heart (Matthew 11:29), riding a donkey. Hungering for righteousness: his food was to do the Father's will (John 4:34); his bodily fasting and thirst (Matthew 4:2; John 19:28) are the lived icon of that deeper appetite. Merciful: at table with sinners (Matthew 9:10-13), forgiving from the cross (Luke 23:34). Pure in heart: no guile on his lips (1 Peter 2:22); "I always do what is pleasing to him" (John 8:29). Peacemaker: he IS our peace (Ephesians 2:14), making peace by the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:20). Persecuted: from Herod's cradle-hunt (Matthew 2:13-18) to Calvary. Then CCC 1717: "The Beatitudes depict the countenance of Jesus Christ." Before they are a program, the Beatitudes are a portrait; and they remain our vocation (CCC 1717 holds both), so the Christian life is becoming what you are looking at (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Build 5. Read Matthew 5:13-16. Notice the grammar: are "salt" and "light" commands or statements? What are the two failure modes, and what is the strange final destination of our good works?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Statements: "You ARE the salt of the earth... you ARE the light of the world." Not become: are. The failure modes are flatness (salt losing its taste: a Christianity indistinguishable from the world preserves nothing) and hiding (the lamp under the bushel: discipleship kept private on purpose). And the destination of visible good works is not our reputation: "that they may see your good works and give glory to your FATHER who is in heaven." Salt is tasted, not seen; light is seen, not credited. The commissioned life points past itself.

Build 6. The last word of the Beatitudes proper is a summons to joy: "Rejoice and be glad" (5:12), spoken to the reviled, persecuted, and falsely accused on Christ's account. After eight sessions: is that summons sane? Answer from the whole ladder. (And say clearly: this is hope's joy; it can coexist with grief, fear, and lament, and the beatitude never accuses the suffering of disobedience for weeping.)

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Only if the ladder is true. If happiness is pleasure plus fortune (Session 1's steelman), the command is insanity. But if the kingdom is real and present (S1-2), if comfort is coming (S3), if righteousness satisfies (S4), if mercy returns mercy (S5), if the pure will SEE GOD (S6), if peacemakers are sons (S7), then persecution can confiscate nothing that beatitude is made of, and joy under fire is simply accurate accounting: "your reward is great in heaven." The martyrs sang because the math worked. That is the study's final claim, and every participant now has to decide whether to live as if it is true.

Steelman: persecution proves abandonment

At full strength, because someone in the room has felt it: if God loves his faithful, their suffering for his sake is inexplicable. A good father does not watch his children beaten for bearing his name and call it blessing from a safe distance; promising pie in the sky ("great is your reward in heaven") is exactly what a religion would invent to keep the abused loyal. The martyrs' courage is real, but courage proves conviction, not truth; people have died

bravely for contradictory faiths. If anything, twenty centuries of persecuted Christians is evidence that no one is minding the store. This objection deserves a grave answer, not a chipper one.

Press: the answer must come from inside tonight's texts and the study's reveal. Where is God while his faithful suffer? Do not accept "it builds character."

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Begin where the reveal ended: the Christian claim is not that God watches persecution from a safe distance; it is that God did not remain distant: the eternal Son became man and moved into the target zone, the Father giving the Son and united with him in the whole saving mission. The face the Beatitudes depict is a persecuted face; the eighth beatitude was Christ's before it was anyone's, and his Passion is not one brave death among the prophets' but the redemptive center they all leaned toward. That changes the geometry of the objection: a God who sent comfort from afar might be accused of distance; the God who entered the suffering himself cannot. Second, the reward language is not an IOU for the abused; it is the claim, tested across seven sessions, that the goods of beatitude are real and guaranteed in Christ: the kingdom already present in mystery, the vision of God pledged for glory, and neither confiscatable by any persecutor, which is why Ignatius wrote like a man en route to a wedding and Kolbe out-loved Auschwitz from inside it. Courage alone proves conviction, granted; but the specific SHAPE of Christian martyrdom (forgiving the executioners, Luke 23:34 and Acts 7:60, joy rather than defiance) is itself part of the evidence, a family resemblance to a crucified Lord who commanded exactly this. (Others too have died bravely, some even forgivingly; the Church simply sets that shape at the center, because her Lord did.) And the objection's honest core deserves honoring: Scripture itself files protests (the martyrs in heaven themselves cry out "how long" before God judges, Revelation 6:10), so the faith has room for the groan. What it does not have room for is the premise that suffering for Christ means abandonment by him: the entire Gospel is the refutation, and Session 8's portrait is its face.

DIG DEEPER

The Roman liturgy hears the Beatitudes as the saints' group portrait: they are the Gospel for the Solemnity of All Saints (November 1), the day the Church celebrates the uncounted multitude who lived them. Read Revelation 7:9-17 alongside Matthew 5:3-12 sometime this week and watch the promises pay out: the hungering satisfied, the mourners' tears wiped away, the persecuted before the throne. The Beatitudes are the itinerary; All Saints is the arrivals board.

Send: Down the Mountain

Send 1. Where in your actual life (workplace, family, feed) is faithfulness currently taxed, and what would it look like to pay the tax with 1 Peter 3:15-16's gentleness and reverence rather than with either silence or spite?

Send 2. CLOSING RITUAL: your beatitude of the month. Each person states aloud: which one beatitude will you deliberately practice for the next thirty days, and what is your first concrete act? (Leaders: write these down and check in with each person in a month; the study ends but the ladder does not.)

Live It This Week

- Complete the set: memorize Matthew 5:10-12 and recite all of 5:3-12 each morning this month, until the portrait is memorized into you.
- Practice your beatitude of the month, beginning with the first concrete act you named tonight.
- Read Revelation 7:9-17 beside Matthew 5:3-12 once this week (see Dig Deeper).
- Consider where this group goes next; the leader has the Catholic Armory catalog. The mountain has more trails.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we climbed the mountain and you showed us your face. You are the poverty that owns the kingdom, the mourning that will be comforted, the meekness inheriting the earth; you are our righteousness, our mercy, the pure vision of the Father, our peace; and you were persecuted so that our persecutions would find us in your company. Seal your portrait in us. Make us salt that keeps its taste and light that is not hidden, until we see you face to face and our joy is complete. And now send us down the mountain: rejoicing, and glad. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MATTHEW 5:16

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 8, in order:

- Matthew 5:10-12
- Matthew 5:3 (frame comparison)
- Matthew 5:13-16
- Jeremiah 20:1-2, 7-9 (discovery)
- 2 Chronicles 24:20-21 (discovery)
- Matthew 23:35, 37 (discovery)
- 1 Peter 3:14-16
- 2 Corinthians 8:9; Matthew 8:20 (reveal)
- John 11:35 (reveal)
- Matthew 11:29 (reveal)
- John 4:34; Matthew 4:2; John 19:28 (reveal)
- 1 Peter 2:22; John 8:29 (reveal)
- Matthew 2:13-18 (reveal)
- Matthew 9:10-13; Luke 23:34 (reveal)
- Ephesians 2:14; Colossians 1:20 (reveal)
- 2 Corinthians 3:18
- Acts 7:60 (steelman)
- Revelation 6:10 (steelman)
- Revelation 7:9-17 (Dig Deeper)