

Briefing Document: Matthew Lesson 45

November 2, 2025

Executive Summary

This document synthesizes the core message from Lesson 45 of "The Sermon on the Mount," titled "Happy Are the Harassed." The central argument is that the Christian response to persecution should be one of active, profound joy. This joy is not based on the suffering itself but is rooted in two foundational truths revealed in scripture. First, persecution endured for the sake of righteousness secures a "great" and eternal reward in heaven, far outweighing any temporal hardship. Second, persecution serves as definitive verification of a believer's faith, aligning them with the historical lineage of God's prophets who were similarly treated by the world. The sermon concludes that persecution, rather than being a cause for despair, is a confirmation of one's possession of Christ's kingdom and a mark of belonging to the righteous line of God's people throughout history.

1. The Enduring Blessings of the Kingdom

The sermon establishes that believers are promised blessings that fully compensate for any persecution experienced in this life. This perspective is built on a proper understanding of the believer's relationship to God's kingdom.

- **A Present and Future Reality:** A believer's citizenship in God's kingdom is an immediate reality ("you live in his kingdom already"), a future millennial reality, and an ultimate eternal reality.
- **Compensation for Suffering:** The message posits that "all that the kingdom can give, all of God's greatness and glorious gifts," serve to compensate for the temporal struggles of persecution.
- **The Gift of the Beatitudes:** The Kingdom of Heaven is presented as the bookend promise of the Beatitudes, mentioned in both the first and the last beatitude. This signifies that possession of the kingdom is the ultimate, unassailable gift for a kingdom citizen.
- **Unalterable Possession:** Worldly persecution, regardless of its form or intensity, can never affect a believer's "possession of Christ's kingdom," which is secure both now and forever.

2. The Mandated Posture: Rejoicing in Persecution

The sermon's primary scriptural basis is Matthew 5:10-12, which outlines the required attitude, or "posture," toward persecution.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:10-12, NKJV)

The key command is to "rejoice and be exceedingly glad." This is not a passive acceptance but an active, vibrant expression of joy.

- **Rejoice (*chairō*^[1]):** The initial command to rejoice is defined as being "really glad."
- **Be Exceedingly Glad (*agalliasathe*^[2]):** Jesus intensifies the command, using a word that implies a demonstrative joy so profound that it compels one to "jump, skip, and shout for joy."

3. The Rationale for Rejoicing

The sermon identifies two explicit reasons from Matthew 5:12 for why a persecuted believer should actively rejoice.

3.1 Reason One: A Great Reward in Heaven

The first reason to rejoice is the promise of an eternal reward that vastly eclipses earthly suffering.

- **Eternal Perspective:** The sermon contrasts the fleeting nature of life on earth, described as a "vapor that appears for a little time and vanishes away" (James 4), with the permanence of heaven. This contrast is used to argue for investing one's life in that which is eternal.
- **Investing in Eternity:** The teaching references Jesus's command in Matthew 6:19-21 to store up treasures in heaven rather than on earth.
- **The Nature of the Reward:** The reward is described as "great" (*polus*^[3]), a Greek term signifying abundance. The rewards are reserved for heaven because humans, in their present state, could not handle them without pride. In heaven, where humility is universal, the rewards can be properly received and laid at the feet of Jesus.
- **Apostolic Precedent:** The Apostle Paul is cited as an example of one who looked forward to his heavenly reward.

3.2 Reason Two: Association with the Prophets

The second reason for rejoicing is that persecution places believers in the esteemed company of God's prophets, who were also persecuted for their faith.

- **A "Classy Group":** This alignment is not about "misery loving company" but about being part of a distinguished spiritual lineage.

- **Verification of Faith:** Persecution from the world serves as a "fantastic truth" and a powerful confirmation of one's salvation and standing within the kingdom. The world persecutes those who speak the message of God, just as it did with the prophets of old.

- **Parabolic Illustration:** Jesus's parable of the vineyard in Matthew 21:33 is used as an illustration. The landowner (God) sent his servants (the prophets) to the tenant farmers (the nation of Israel), who beat and killed them. This demonstrates the historical pattern of God's messengers being rejected and persecuted by the world.

- **A Righteous Lineage:** The sermon emphasizes that by enduring persecution, a believer can be confident that they "belong to the righteousness line that is descended from the very prophets themselves." This is presented as a core component of a believer's security. As Hebrews states regarding these figures of faith, they were those "of whom the world was not worthy."

4. Concluding Illustrations on Fearlessness

The sermon concludes with historical illustrations that reinforce the theme of finding security and fearlessness in an eternal identity, rather than in temporal circumstances.

- **John Knox:** The Scottish preacher "feared God so much that he never dared to fear any man."

- **Chrysostom:** The early church father, when threatened by the Roman Emperor Arcadius, demonstrated the unassailability of his faith:

- **On Banishment:** "You cannot banish me, for the world is my Father's house."
- **On Death:** "Nay, but you cannot, for my life is hid with Christ in God."
- **On Loss of Wealth:** "My treasures are in heaven where none can break through and steal."
- **On Loss of Friends:** "You cannot do it, for I have a friend in heaven who said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"

Greek Terminology

Term	Phonetic Pronunciation	Definition from Source	Context
Chairō	(KAI-roh)	To be really glad.	
Agallias <i>the</i>	(ag-al-lee-AS-theh)	To be so glad that you jump, skip, and shout for joy.	
Polus	(POL-oos)	Great; abundant.	

[^1]: See table: *Chairō* [^2]: See table: *Agallias* [^3]: See table: *Polus*