

BLESSED ARE THE PERSECUTED

Message 16

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-12

INTRO: We come now to what many view as the last beatitude in verse 10, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." I believe the Lord began to prepare me over a year ago to do these messages at this time. It was well over a year ago when I began to study the beatitudes. Somehow they gripped me and would not let me go. Many nights I lay pondering these beatitudes. All my spare time I studied them and read about these beatitudes. Then, at a camp-out for our young married folk, I shared from these beatitudes, but I had no idea what lay before us, just a few months from then. And when I began to preach on these beatitudes, I gave very little thought to this eighth beatitude. But now I see that the Lord prepared me for this.

And so, as we come to this beatitude, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake", I want to simply introduce this beatitude this morning. We are in the most searching beatitude of them all. Let me begin by just briefly mentioning again what a beatitude is. Here is what I gave you in the first message. I said, "Now this passage is called the 'beatitudes', and so we must ask, just what is a beatitude? One commentary says, 'The sayings in this subdivision are called beatitudes from the word *beati* (meaning 'blessed'), with which they begin in the Vulgate, or Latin Bible" (The Fourfold Gospel Comm.). So the word behind our English word 'beatitude' is Latin. The NT word that has been translated 'beatitude' though, is the word 'makarios'" end quote. So the heading, 'the beatitudes' comes from the word translated, 'blessed'.

Let me give you once more what I believe this word, 'makarios' or 'blessed' means. I would translate it as meaning, 'to be envied...' For example, "To be envied are the poor in spirit..." etc... And we have come to the eighth beatitude which says, "Blessed are the persecuted..." Now, if the clause, "Blessed are the poor in spirit..." goes against all humanistic thinking, the clause, "Blessed are those who are persecuted..." is beyond ludicrous, humanly speaking.

But before we begin to consider why that is a blessed state to be in, let us begin with a major interpretational question regarding our passage. It is this: Are verses 10-12 two beatitudes or one? Verse 10 says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Verses 11-12 then say, "Blessed are you when they shall revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake." This section of the sermon on the Mount is called the beatitudes because each one begins with the word 'blessed.' And here we have two sections beginning with the word blessed, and our question is, are these two separate beatitudes; or is it just one?

D. Martyn Lloyd Jones views this as just one beatitude and takes as evidence that verse 10 is the last beatitude from the fact that the promise of this beatitude is the same as the first. Both end with the promise that such persons will inherit the kingdom of God. I would add to that, that in verses 10-11, for the first time we have a shift that indicates a difference between verses 10-11 and the other sections that begin with the word *blessed*. So, to our pastoral students that were in the process of learning grammar last winter, how many numbers of person may be indicated by a pronoun? Well, I know that is a tough question, so here is a clue: There is the first person pronoun. How many persons may be indicated by pronouns?? Answer: Three.

Here is our grammar lesson for this morning. First person refers to the speaker or speakers. These are 'I' 'me' singular, and 'we' or 'us' plural. Second person refers to the one or the ones spoken to. This is 'you' in all forms unless one uses the old English of the KJV, which is more accurate here since it has thee, thou and you. Third person is the one or the ones spoken about. These are 'he' or 'him' in the singular or 'they' or 'them' in the plural.

So, the first beatitude says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God." What person is the pronoun 'theirs' in? Third person. The second beatitude is, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." What person is the pronoun 'they' in? Third person. The third beatitude is, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Since

it is 'they' as in the previous one, it is third person. The fourth beatitude is, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." Again it is third person. The fifth beatitude says, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall in obtain mercy." Once more it is in the third person. The sixth beatitude says, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." The seventh beatitude says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God." Again, the pronoun is in the third person. You see, the pronouns are consistently in the third person. The eighth beatitude says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And maybe you say, "Well, this is boring. I can see it myself now. They are all in the third person."

Not so fast. There is a lesson when we come now to our verses under question, verses 11-12. It says, "Blessed are you when they revile you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake." Three times the pronoun 'you' occurs in that sentence, and may I ask you, what person is the pronoun 'you'? It is a second person pronoun. So here we have a major shift. The Lord is now speaking to the disciples for the time when they will be persecuted. Jesus is confident that the disciples will come through the other seven beatitudes. Up until now Jesus has been talking to them about some other person; the poor in spirit and so on. But now He is talking to them about them, for the time when this will happen to them. Jesus knows what will happen to anyone who experiences the first seven beatitudes.

Note also that He did not say, "Blessed are you, IF they will persecute you..." He says, "Blessed are you WHEN they persecute you..." For those who fulfill the previous beatitudes, it is not a question of 'if' they will suffer persecution; it is a matter of 'when'. In an article in the April 2015 issue of the *Herald of His Coming*, Dave Butts wrote an article called, "Bearing the Disgrace of Jesus". He mentioned the last time Brother Andrew, the writer of the book, "God's Smuggler" met with the Iranian pastor, Haik, Hovsepian-Mehr. Haik had served for many years as a pastor in Iran. When brother Andrew and Haik parted, Haik said, 'Brother Andrew, when they kill me it will be for speaking and not for being silent.'" Did you note how certain he was that he would be killed? He said, "When..." not "If..." And Jesus said,

"Blessed are you WHEN they persecute you...", not "...if they persecute you."

Furthermore, in all the other passages begun by the word 'blessed', there is no instruction. They are all simple indicative statements of fact. But look now at verse 12, "Rejoice..." Let me ask our grammar students, "In what mood is the verb, 'Rejoice'?" It is in the imperative mood. It is the first command in the entire section, and we will see later just how important this command is. I think it is fair to say, because of these differences, that verses 10-11 form a conclusion to the previous eight beatitudes. Jesus is giving the disciples instruction as to what to do when they have come to the eighth, and they are persecuted for righteousness sake, then they are to rejoice and be exceedingly glad. In the Christian life, they have reached the summit, persecution. So, all of that to say this: I believe there are eight beatitudes, and verses 11-12 form a kind of conclusion to this section.

Persecution is a large subject in Scripture. It begins in Genesis four and continues through the book of Revelation. Probably what has contributed to the fall of North American Evangelicalism is the fact that we can so easily avoid persecution. A while ago, at my one of my daughter's homes, I saw a book called, "Captive In Iran" and I read a little in the introduction which was given by Ann Graham Lotz. She says she interviewed two women from Evan Prison in Iran and she said they made a comment in that interview that haunts her still. She writes, "With tears streaming down their faces they said it had been easier for them to experience God's peace and presence inside Evan Prison than on the outside in America." And I ask why? I think it was because they could not avoid persecution there. Ann Lotz writes that Evan prison in Iran has a worse reputation than Alcatraz or Angola in the United States" (g. vii.). You see, everything around us, gives us freedom to avoid persecution. Some years ago we had a Christian in our church from Ethiopia, and he said if you can live as a Christian in Canada, you can be a Christian anywhere.

But, the fact that there is so little persecution in North America, is not because there is no opposition to the preaching of righteousness, and truth and sin. It is because we fail to bear witness to righteousness and truth and sin and we fail to live it. It is very easy in our country to avoid persecution,

and one of the greatest factors is the fear of man and the crowd principle. John Loeffler gives the following principles regarding persecution. Rule # 1: If one doesn't see persecution coming, one won't know what to do when it gets here. We struggled at this point last summer. Loeffler, who personally knew Richard and Sabina Wurmbrandt said Sabina was a feisty little lady. When they were in a room full of pastors in Romania discussing how Christianity could work with Communism, she turned to her big tall husband and said, "They are spitting in the face of Christ." And Richard said, "If I go up there and say something, you won't have a husband." And she said, "I'd rather have a dead husband than a coward." He got up and told them what needed to be said. That began his 14 years experience in prison.

Rule # 2, according to Loeffler is, "You can't make a deal with the devil." You have to think about that. That is what we are always tempted to do. And he said, "Many churches in the West are doing this now, even conservative churches." Rule # 3: Evil rides in on the back of a white horse." And Rule # 4 is the one I was working my way to when I spoke of the fear of man. Rule # 4 he said is this: "The herd is almost always running in the wrong direction." And so I believe it is the fear of man that helps us to decide to avoid persecution.

In the little church bulletin insert called the, "Sunday Digest" dated September 17, 1995, is an article my wife pointed out to me by Allen Redpath, a highly respected minister who lived from 1907-1989. Here is what it said: "The very fact that a work is of God is that it will always arouse the opposition of the enemy. One life lived in the power of the indwelling Christ will stir the hatred of men whose sinful lives are a challenge by way of contrast. I would ask you to assess your own experience by that statement. Wherever the temple of the Holy Spirit is being built up in the Christian heart and a work of grace is going on, if the child of God is building upon the foundation which is Christ and seeks to become more like the Lord, you can be sure that such a life is arousing hatred, opposition and bitterness..

"Satan is never an opponent to orthodoxy. It is well to remember that. The Pharisees were the most orthodox people you could find. Satan is never the opponent of religion or of mere creed, but he is always antagonistic to every evidence of the Holy

Spirit life. Through the Christian's journey and through all the battle, Satan will do all in his power to drag such a man down to prove that his strength is greater than the strength of Jesus Christ Himself. Does your Christian life constitute a challenge? Does it arouse opposition? Or do you find yourself still tremendously popular with worldly people (and I would add, with the religious)? If you do, there is something wrong with your testimony, for the Lord Jesus said: 'Remember the word that I said unto you. The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you...' (John 15:20, KJV)."

Let me share a little of our own experience. I told you earlier that when I began to study the beatitudes about a year or more ago. I was captured by them. I read and studied them. Then, last summer, when we were still in our former building, I shared with our older youth at a campout from the beatitudes. One of those young men told me how blessed he was that I was camped in the back of our mini van, when most of the youth were there in their big trailers.

Just a few months after that, through the corruptive lies of a young man in our church, the young man I just mentioned, and numerous others could hardly wait to get rid of me. Older men committed sins such as I have never seen in a church. One of them later called one of the most sinful meetings I have ever witnessed, as having taken place by the grace of God.

In an earlier experience in a church when I felt I had to leave because of the things that were taking place, a young man who had observed what happened, but whom I did not know, sent me this e-mail. "Hello Pastor Schlamp, I typed out this message for you so you can read it at your convenience. (It is) Paul Washer's Warning of the coming persecution." And here is what he quoted from Paul Washer: "The church in America is going to suffer so terribly. We laugh now, but they will come after us, they will come after our children. They will close the net around us while we are playing soccer mom and soccer dad. While we are arguing over so many things, and mesmerized by so many little trinkets. The net even now is closing around (us) even you and your children and your grandchildren, and it does not cause you to fear."

"You will be isolated from society, as has already happened. Anyone who runs for office, who actually believes the Bible, will be considered a lunatic, until finally we are silenced. We will be called things we are not, and persecuted, not because we are followers of Christ, but as radical fundamentalists who do not know the true way of Christ, which of course is love and tolerance. We will go down as the greatest bigots and haters of mankind in history. They have already come after your children, and for most of you, they got them. They got them through the public school's indoctrination, in university indoctrination and you wonder why your children come out not serving the Lord. It's because you fed them right into the Devils mouth.

"So little by little the net is closing around and it's not so little by little, look how fast things are going downhill even in just a matter of weeks. A matter of weeks! But at the same time, know this; Persecution is always meant for evil, but God always means it for good. Is it not better, to suffer in this life, to have an extra weight of glory, in heaven? You must settle this in your mind; this is the one thing I want to say over and over. Down through history you have a wrong idea of martyrdom and persecution. You think that these men were persecuted and martyred for their sincere faith in Jesus Christ. That WAS the real reason, but no one heard that publicly.

"They were martyred and they were persecuted as enemies of the state, as child molesters, as bigots, as narrow minded stupid people who had fallen for a ruse and could contribute nothing to society. Your suffering will not be noble, so your mind must be filled with the Word of God when all people persecute you and turn on you. And if the Spirit of God and common grace pulls back (leave out 'and') you (will) see even your children and your grandchildren tossing in the lot that you should die.

"This is no game. You want revival and awakening but know this; for the most part, great awakenings have come only preceding great national catastrophes or the persecution of the church. I believe that God IS bringing a great awakening, but I believe he is raising up young men, who are strong in trust in the providence of God to be able to wade through the Hell that's going to break loose on us, and it will be on us before we even recognize it. Unless in God's providence He is not done. This is not silly talk. Apart from a great awakening, these things are going to come upon you. Be ready to lose your homes, your cars, and everything. May this warning not fall upon deaf ears", end quote.

Then this young man who wrote this letter said, "On a side note, I would like to say I was very disheartened over the last few weeks in regards to all that went on within the ministerial and subsequently the members of my conference. This was a perfect example of what Paul Washer is speaking of here. We were, and still are, so busy arguing we don't even see the danger surrounding us! May we return to the true purpose of the Church. Fulfilling the great commission, purifying ourselves and presenting ourselves without blemish awaiting the return of our bridegroom Jesus Christ", end quote.

I got that letter on Monday, Oct 27, 2008. In October of 2014, we saw sin committed by professing believers such as exceeded anything I have seen in my life. We have been called a cult. Yet, never once has anyone come with evidence of any message we have done and said, "Look at this. This is wrong." It has never happened once yet. Those who deal with cults expose them and show why they are cults by those teacher's own teachings. When you are called a cult and that can't be done, you know you have a problem.

Now, it is most appropriate in the passage which we are to consider next, to give you this information so that you will be able to understand what has happened to us in the recent past. I trust you will be able to appreciate in some new way what has taken place. You see, Paul Washer said something very significant. Let me quote it again. He said, "You must settle this in your mind; this is the one thing I want to say over and over. Down through history you have a wrong idea of martyrdom and persecution. You think that these men were persecuted and martyred for their sincere faith in Jesus Christ. That WAS the real reason, but no one heard that publicly." When persecution takes place, the reasons that are put forward are never the real cause. Look at our own situation. You will see that precisely.

Washer also said, "We will be called things we are not, and persecuted not because we are followers of Christ, but as radical fundamentalists who do not know the true way of Christ, which of course is love and tolerance. We will go down as the greatest bigots and haters of mankind in history." Do you understand what he is saying? These will be professing believers persecuting believers. But they will claim what they are doing is not because those they persecute stand for Christ. No, no, it is because it is for the sake of love and tolerance. Those who take stands are viewed as unloving and intolerant.

Then he says, "They were martyred and they were persecuted as enemies of the state, as child molesters, as bigots, as narrow

minded stupid people who had fallen for a ruses and could contribute nothing to society." What is Paul Washer trying to say there? He is saying that those who persecute others always tend to give you anything but the real reason why they are doing what they are doing. If they gave the real reason, that would not look or sound good. So if you listen to what has been said of us, in light of what really happened, this is precisely what happened. S.M. Davies said that when people tell you why they left such and such a church, they usually do not give you the real reason. So it is with persecution.

So, let me ask you, why does persecution happen to Christians? Righteousness! I see as the key ingredients of true Christianity as standing for a Biblical view of sin and a biblical view of truth. That will lead to righteousness. When these two matters are addressed, they will cause persecution. Listen to this quote I got from one of our folk recently, "The further a society drifts from truth, the more it will hate those who speak it." That was said by George Orwell, who lived from June 1903 to January 1950. By the way, his real name was not George Orwell. It was Eric Arthur Blair.

There is a reason why the Church today has fallen into the seeker friendly mode, and from there to the emergent views. It is because the past few generations failed to be peacemakers. When it came to many issues such as dress, or drink or dance or divorce, or the teaching of evolution or day age theories and a host of other things, they failed to rise up for the truth. Slowly, like the frog in the frying pan, Christianity in America got fried.

Jones says, "In a sense it is because the Christian is peacemaker that he is persecuted. What a wealth of insight and understanding that gives us into the nature and character of the Christian life! I do not think you will ever find the biblical doctrines of sin and the world put more perfectly or precisely anywhere in Scripture than in these two beatitudes—'Blessed are the peacemakers', and 'Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake'. If a Christian man is a peacemaker this is what happens to him." Jones says this is one of the most searching beatitudes of them all.

The older generation of today, largely because they failed to take stands when they should have, sit on the sidelines and mourn what is happening inside churches while a younger

generation laughs at their outdated ideas. I watched years ago, as a younger generation took the speaker's stands, and how they began to shoot down the older generation. Today, the older generation is paying a huge price. They can hardly enter a church where they feel at home. It is not only because they are not used to these new ways of worship; it is because many of these new ways are ungodly. And because they failed to take stands, bit by bit, their heritage was frittered away. Today, if they want any hope they need to do three things. First pray; second pray, and third, yes pray.

Truth seekers of today's generation bears the shame of being persecuted within the church. I have told you numerous times of the missionary who had made 40 trips to China, often taking American tourists with him. And when the Americans were there, they said to the Chinese, "Oh, its not so bad here." And the Chinese Christians said, "Oh, it would not be so bad if we kept our mouth shut." That is what we have done in the decaying church of America. Let me quote Haik, the Iranian pastor once more: "Brother Andrew, when they kill me it will be for speaking and not for being silent."

At our Wednesday prayer meetings we go through all the prayers of the Bible one by one. And recently we were in Job 21. Job talks about the wicked and how they flourish with seemingly no trouble. Look at verse 13 (read). All these unbelievers realize they must die. They have learned that what Ray Comfort says is true, "ten out of ten die". But still they do not pay attention to that. So look at their prayer in verses 14-15 (read). I don't think that the wicked say that in words. They say it by the way they live.

In Revelation 3:17 Jesus said to the Laodicean Church, "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing...'" But listen, no Laodicean church says that in words. They say it in actions. And these ungodly people by their actions, say to God, "Depart from us, for we do not desire the knowledge of Your ways. We don't want truth."

I was reading in the Gospels recently, where Jesus went to Gadara and there he was met by a man infested by demons. And Jesus sent those demons into a herd of pigs, which had no business being in Israel anyway, and they ran into the Sea of

Galilee and drowned. And when this was noised abroad, the people were afraid. Afraid of what? Demoniacs getting healed? No. They were afraid of truth! And they gathered together, and together they came to Jesus and said, "Please leave our coasts." Do you know what they were saying, "Depart from us, for we do not desire the knowledge of Your ways." We don't want truth.

Now I propose to you that if I were to preach the messages I preach in this church in many North American churches, including some in our own town; such subjects as divorce and remarriage, alcohol the problems with unconditional love, or unconditional forgiveness and so on, they would say, "Depart from us, for we do not desire the knowledge of the Lord's ways. We don't want truth." Oh no, they would never say that in words. They say it by actions. Listen to this quote by Leonard Ravenhill: "If Jesus had preached the same message that ministers preach today, He would never have been crucified."

Recently, when my wife and I were traveling through the Rocky Mountains on the Pine Pass, and she was doing her daily reading and read me some of the things she came across. One of those was Hebrews 13:13 which says, "Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach." When Jesus was crucified, He had to carry His cross outside the camp, outside Jerusalem. He bore shame heaped upon shame. That, according to this verse, is to be our lot. We are to bear His reproach outside the camp. But if ever we sought to avoid something, it is this. Let people begin to frown at us, speak negatively of us, look down on us, and we soon crumble and fall in line with society.

Shortly after my wife shared that verse with me, I read the article in the Herald of His Coming, April 2015 issue the called, "Bearing the Disgrace of Jesus". It was written by Dave Butts and he said, "The great heresy for many Christians today is to believe that the Christian life is an easy respectable way of life." Let me ask here, such heresies as the prosperity Gospel, what do these teachings know about our present beatitude? What do they know of going outside the camp with Jesus? Today, there is abroad an easy believism. There is a Christianity that needs no cross. It requires no repentance, no confession. All it needs is love and acceptance and tolerance. And I must tell you that it is not true Christianity.

Let me quote to you rather lengthily, from John MacArthur on this eighth beatitude. He writes, "'All who desire to live godly

in Christ Jesus will be persecuted' ([2 Tim. 3:12](#)). Before writing those words Paul had just mentioned some of his own "persecutions, and suffering, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra" ([v. 11](#)). As one who lived the kingdom life he had been persecuted, and all others who live the kingdom life can expect similar treatment. What was true in ancient Israel is true today and will remain true until the Lord returns. 'As at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also' ([Gal. 4:29](#)).

He writes further, "Imagine a man who accepted a new job in which he had to work with especially profane people. When at the end of the first day his wife asked him how he had managed, he said, 'Terrific! They never guessed I was a Christian.' As long as people have no reason to believe that we are Christians, at least obedient and righteous Christians, we need not worry about persecution. But as soon as we manifest the standards of Christ we will share the reproach of Christ. Those born only of the flesh will persecute those born of the Spirit."

"... To live for Christ is to live in opposition to Satan in his world and in his system. Christlikeness in us will produce the same results as Christlikeness did in the apostles, in the rest of the early church, and in believers throughout history. Christ living in His people today produces the same reaction from the world that Christ Himself produced when He lived on earth as a man.

"Righteousness is confrontational, and even when it is not preached in so many words, it confronts wickedness by its very contrast. Abel did not preach to Cain, but Abel's righteous life, typified by his proper sacrifice to the Lord, was a constant rebuke to his wicked brother—who in a rage finally slew him. When Moses chose to identify with his own despised Hebrew people rather than compromise himself in the pleasures of pagan Egyptian society, he paid a great price. But he considered "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt" ([Heb. 11:26](#)).

"The Puritan writer Thomas Watson said of Christians: 'Though they be never so meek, merciful, pure in heart, their piety will not shield them from sufferings. They must hang their harp on the willows and take the cross. The way to heaven is by way of thorns and blood... Set it down as a maxim, if you will follow Christ you must see the swords and staves' (*The Beatitudes* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971], pp. 259-60).

"Savonarola was one of the greatest reformers in the history of the church. In his powerful condemnation of personal sin and

ecclesiastical corruption, that Italian preacher paved the way for the Protestant Reformation, which began a few years after his death. 'His preaching was a voice of thunder,' writes one biographer, 'and his denunciation of sin was so terrible that the people who listened to him went about the streets half-dazed, bewildered and speechless. His congregations were so often in tears that the whole building resounded with their sobs and their weeping.' But the people and the church could not long abide such a witness, and for preaching uncompromised righteousness Savonarola was convicted of 'heresy,' he was hanged, and his body was burned.

"Persecution is one of the surest and most tangible evidences of salvation. Persecution is not incidental to faithful Christian living but is certain evidence of it. Paul encouraged the Thessalonians by sending them Timothy, 'so that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know' ([1 Thess. 3:3-4](#)). Suffering persecution is part of the normal Christian life (cf. [Rom. 8:16-17](#)). And if we never experience ridicule, criticism, or rejection because of our faith, we have reason to examine the genuineness of it. 'For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake,' Paul says, 'not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me' ([Phil. 1:29-30](#)). Persecution for Christ's sake is a sign of our own salvation just as it is a sign of damnation for those who do the persecuting ([v. 28](#))" end quote.

Guy Dowd, a Christian teacher in the public school system in the United States, who became teacher of the year some years ago in the US was puzzled why Christians in public school were so shy to share Christ. It took him some time to figure out that they were so careful what they said about their faith because they 'undercover agents.' Is that not a problem for many of us? We are undercover agents. We are the Lord's secret service.

John MacArthur says in another place, "Those who have been persecuted are the citizens of the kingdom, those who live out the previous seven beatitudes. To the degree that they fulfill the first seven they may experience the eighth."

So, we have introduced the subject of the eighth beatitude this morning: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."