

**1.31.21**  
**Being a Peacemaker is NOT Easy Part 3**  
**Matthew 5:9-12**

This morning, let's pick up with a verse from last week.

**Romans 12:18, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."**

If it is possible Paul says. Meaning, you have done everything within your power and the power God has given you to make peace with all those around you.

Paul wrote the church in the Ephesus the following.

**Ephesians 4:1-3, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."**

Someone who is a peacemaker is someone who God calls His Son or His daughter. They have taken on the characteristics of their Father, they are true disciples of His Son Jesus.

Let's read the next portion of Jesus' sermon found in Matthew 5.

**Matthew 5:10-12, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."**

The first thing I think we can ask about this passage is persecution against Christians relevant today?

First let's look at it from a world perspective. Two weeks ago Jeremy asked for prayer for a person they knew in Uganda, Africa. In Uganda and throughout Africa, Asia, South American, over a 150 of other nations in the world, persecution of the followers of Christ is occurring on a tremendous scale.

The latest statistics tells us that in 2019 245 million Christians have experienced high levels of persecution for following Jesus. Also in 2019 4,134 recorded Christians were killed for their faith. This number does not represent the untold numbers of those who are not recorded. 2,625 Christians have been arrested and imprisoned and 1,266 church buildings have been attacked and sometimes destroyed.

From a global standpoint, the numbers actually show that persecution of Christians around the world is on the rise.

In this country, we are getting a taste of what Christian persecution is going to be like. I believe that it is possible that over the next couple of years we will begin to see more and more religious liberties and freedoms removed. Persecution is on our doorstep.

But persecution for a Christian goes deeper than what is happening on a global and national level.

Look at what Paul wrote. **2 Timothy 3:12, "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."**

Paul makes this statement on the deep conviction that the nature of Christianity and the sinful nature of humanity following its own lusts will always create conflict.

Let's break this down a little bit.

## 1. The **nature** of a disciple of Jesus:

As we recall the structure of the teachings of Jesus as found here in Matthew 5, we have seen that the first three BeAttitudes in verses 3-5 create a hunger and thirst for righteousness.

**Blessed are the poor in spirit.**

**Blessed are those who mourn.**

**Blessed are those who are meek, humble.**

These individuals are described as a person who is experiencing an empty holiness. They know something is lacking and so they began a search for something that is outside of themselves. They are poverty stricken and they mourn over their state. Then they are humble in their acceptance of the teachings of Jesus.

- a. **A person is blessed by Jesus by: receiving the kingdom of heaven, being comforted by Jesus, by inheriting the earth, by filling the person with Jesus' righteousness.**

**This blessing, this filling of the righteousness of Jesus looks like verses 7-9.**

**A righteous person is merciful towards everyone.**

**A righteous person has a pure heart towards God and all humanity.**

**A righteous person is a peacemaker.**

Great blessing occur in the believers life when they enter into and are obedient to the teachings of Jesus.

2. The **result** of living a righteous life leads to not only blessings but...

- a. **Matthew 5:10a, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness..."**

**b. Matthew 5:11, “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.”**

It is as we are following Jesus as our leader that we will be persecuted. The mercy, peacemaking and righteousness is done out of our love for Jesus and it is because of Jesus that a Christian is persecuted.

As we promote Jesus and His teachings of righteousness, people will insult, persecute and say all kinds of mean and untrue things about you but it is not about you. As verse 11 says, it is not about you but about Jesus in you.

The question now arises, if we are following Jesus why does this create such a conflict? From a Christian’s point of view and experience, we know the teachings of Jesus lead a person into a whole and fulfilled life. A life that is truly blessed as mentioned so many times here in this passage. So why the conflict? Well, let’s next look at the...

**3. The nature of persecution**

There are several reasons that we can look at.

**Luke 16:14-15, “Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him (Jesus). And He said to them, ‘You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.’”**

Back up and look at verse 13, **“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”**

Jesus gets right to the point and says you cannot have two masters. You will always love one and because of that love you will be devoted to it and you will despise what opposes it. Jesus uses the example of money but it's not just money. It can be a number of any other things as we will see here in a minute.

To tie this into persecution,

- a. **Persecution is generated from those who love something more than God, and in turn, they despise anything that disrupts their love**

Look at this next verse.

**1 John 2:15, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world."**

Certainly, by reading this verse we can see where many forms of persecution for a Christian comes from.

The lust of the flesh. The flesh has many different impulses. For food, for pleasure, for safety, for many different things.

I know someone whose drive in life consisted of finding all the different restaurants to try out. Very rarely did they eat at home and they figured out how much they were spending on eating out one year and it was near \$10,000. Just in one year!

Now there is nothing wrong with eating out, Michal and I are headed to Denver today and the first stop is at one of our favorite restaurants. But when food becomes an obsession it can become a little god in person's life.

Lust of the flesh can also be sexual. We have seen the pursuit of this lust being promoted in our country in many, many different and destructive ways.

Lust of the eyes we know to be greed and jealousy. In the ten commandments God said you should not covet your neighbor's house, wife or possessions. Greed is probably one on of the main problems we have in our nation and within our leaders.

And here's the kicker. The boastful pride of life. I like what I do and who is to say any different. If you, God, the church or anyone else doesn't like my lifestyle of living in the lust of my flesh, eyes and the my pursuit of it then be damned.

When a Christian desires to be godly in all of their relationships and in every part of their life, when you follow the righteousness of Jesus in His strength and for His glory, you are inevitably going to run into persecution and when you do, there is a choice. There are two different responses that can occur. Persecution or conformity.

**John 3:21, "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."**

A few verses later Jesus says His disciples are the light and the salt. That is because they are carrying the very presence of Jesus, the Light, in them.

**John 15:20a, "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master,' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."**

As we see our nation and the world continue to slip into the pursuit of their fleshly, unsaved nature, persecution will increase. I pray for revival of this nation and I encourage you to be in constant prayer as well.

But where we find ourselves as Christians who are strongly adhering to the ways of Jesus, standing for righteousness, we can expect persecution of different types. We may lose some friends. We may even lose some interaction with family members.

I have another brother whom you haven't met. He is doing better today but for years, all he was about was sex. He thought sex, he talked sex and he pursued sex. It seemed like that was all he was about. I found it very difficult to be around him very much. I was some because I loved him and I wanted to be a witness to him but I did have to put up some boundaries around him.

In reality I had a choice when I was around him. I could stand firm for Jesus and his righteousness or I could have conformed to his crudeness. I could have slipped for a few hours into what he was about and this is where I wonder if some Christians have fallen down.

In their desire to be liked and accepted, even by some of their family, they have compromised. They have at times, hid their light in a bushel as Jesus says later.

I think in light of the things we are seeing today we should all examine ourselves to see if we are playing a kind of cowardly form of Christian incognito. We are Christian when it is convenient but we conform to the world when we might be challenged for our faith.

That is dangerous business if we allow this kind of behavior to seep into our lives. By hiding our Christianity under a bushel we are setting up those around us to continue to pursue their lusts with no recourse. Salvation for them begins to drift further and further away.

It is only when we bring in the light of Christ by our behavior, our words and our choices that the Spirit can begin His work of conviction and salvation.

If we have allowed our light, the light of Christ, to slip under a bushel at times, we should repent and resolve to stand more firm on who God has created us to be, a bearer of His light.

#### 4. The **blessings** of being persecuted for Christ's righteousness

**Matthew 5:10, 12, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."**

One of the first blessings we see is we are the recipients of...

- a. The kingdom of heaven. This is not just heaven when this life is over. This is having the blessings, power, love, joy, peace and all the fruits of the Spirit poured out in our lives.**

Persecution has never stopped the church or Christians. In fact persecution has always strengthened Christians and the church. It has, through the obedience to the Holy Spirit made them even more powerful. As you are faithful in your Christian witness, more power flows from God's kingdom into to you, empowering you to be even a stronger witness for Jesus will occur.

- b. Your reward in heaven will great**

We have touched upon a study of rewards in heaven but the greatest reward will be when you hear, well done my good and faithful servant.

- c. You are compared to the prophets of old.**

Believe it or not, as faithful witnesses for Jesus, God puts you right up there with Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and many others.



These servants of God and many others were faithful unto death. They dealt with many rejections, verbal abuses, persecutions of many kinds. By their country men, by their families and sometimes by their spouses. Men and women whom the world was not worthy of.

Read their stories, draw strength from their faith. Read through Hebrews 11 and you will see some of the real times of trials and tribulations their endured.

In closing, let's read **Hebrews 12:1-2a**, **“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...”**

Let's Pray