



Blessed are the Persecuted

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Blessed are those who are Persecuted

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

This 8th and last of the beatitudes provides a proper conclusion to the list. Those who faithfully live according to the first seven beatitudes are guaranteed at some point to experience the eighth. Those who live righteously will inevitably be persecuted for it. Godliness generates hostility and antagonism from the world.

To live by the principles of Jesus (as described in this text) is to stand out from the crowd – to be different. The world has always been intolerant of God’s righteousness. Those who live in darkness hate the light. It is ironic that peacemakers are the objects of scorn and persecution.

- Jesus says that even this inevitably painful occurrence is a source of blessing (happiness) for the Christian. How can this be so?

I. The Inevitability of Persecution: God makes it crystal clear – Those who choose to serve Him will be persecuted by those who do not. Despite the prevalent assumption that good and evil are subjective, God’s word describes a distinct dichotomy. The children of God are opposed by the children of the devil.

1 John 3:10-13 – *10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. 11 For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, 12 not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous. 13 Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you.*

A. Jesus warned his disciples of the imminent hatred that would be exerted against them. **John 15:18-20** *18 “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. 20 Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.*

(NIV) Jesus spoke clearly about what was coming. **Mark 13:9-13** – *9 “But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought* before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. 10 And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. 11 But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate* what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. 12 Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. 13 And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.* If you are going to be a Christian, you can expect opposition, even from those close to you. It is an inescapable price of godly living.

1. Paul encouraged Timothy to follow his example in facing the inevitable.

- **2 Timothy 3:10-12** *But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, 11 persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra – what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. 12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.* Paul mentions 3 specific occasions of opposition from his past.

- At Antioch (**Acts 13:50**) the Jews stirred up the city and Paul and Barnabas were “*expelled from their region.*”
- At Iconium (**Acts 14:2-5**) “*...the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren...This led to a “violent attempt ...made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them...”*”
- At Lystra (**Acts 14:19**) the Jews from Antioch and Iconium persuade the multitude to stone Paul, dragging him out of the city and leaving him for dead. In every city there was opposition that became personal.

II. The Reason for Persecution – The blessing announced in Matthew 5 pertains to a specific type of persecution. “***those who are persecuted for righteousness sake***” Righteousness is simply doing what is right. A. Not all persecution is blessed by God, only those who suffer for doing what is right. Those who are persecuted for the same reason Jesus was persecuted. **1 Peter 4:13-16** – *13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. 14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters. 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.*

A. Persecuted by choice. It does not come simply because I call myself a Christian, but rather because I choose to live as one. Christians do not seek persecution, or live the life of an antagonist. But they recognize the consequences of the choice to live righteously. It is easy to avoid persecution. Just “live and let live”, laugh at the world’s jokes, enjoy its entertainment, refuse to expose its sinfulness, and refuse to take a stand for Christ.

1. The choices of true discipleship are various, depending on our circumstances and obligations. In Ancient Rome Christians were obligated by their government to give an oral pledge of religious worship to the deified Emperor once a year. If they did this they were free to worship whatever god they chose. When Christians refused they were considered traitors. They often lost their property, families, were imprisoned or even burned alive and allowed to be torn to pieces by wild beasts. One Roman poet spoke of them as “*the panting, huddling flock whose only crime was Christ.*”

2. We seldom face such devastating physical consequences. But the cost of discipleship is still persecution. We are called upon to make choices that will separate us from the world around us. We may

be expected to hedge on the quality of our work in order to increase company profits; expected to lie or engage in the entertainment of the world, in order to secure a sale. Expected to accept the sinful lifestyle of others. If we refuse we will be ostracized by others. There is always a cost being righteous.

3. *“For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels” (Luke 9:26)*. If we are ashamed of Christ, He will be ashamed of us. Christ also warned, *“Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for in the same way their fathers used to treat the false prophets” (Luke 6:26)*. In this sense being mistreated by others is evidence of righteous living and gives the Christian confidence in the face of difficulty or uncertainty.

B. **The righteousness that brings persecution is Biblically defined.** The world is not opposed to “good” people, as long they judge their “goodness” by its standards, and not God’s. If you let society determine what is right or good, you will not be persecuted for being a “good” person.

III. The Faces of Persecution: What can we expect from the world if we live by God’s standards? In the last beatitude Jesus speaks of three specific types of trouble we can expect.

A. **Reproach** (Revile) – The Greek word (*oneididzo*), means primarily to insult, to mock, scorn, ridicule, swear at, and abuse.

1. Jesus faced this type of assault often: He was called a Samaritan and a devil (Jn 8:48), a mad man (Jn 10:20), and a glutton and a winebibber (Lk. 7:34). On the cross *“even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him”*. (Matthew 27:44) But, being reviled, he did not revile in return. **1 Peter 2:23** – *23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;*

2. Bible-believing Christians are still castigated even by the most conservative religious denominations. We are called ignorant, out of touch with the modern world, unthinking, naïve, and even labeled as terrorists.

B. **Persecution** (*dioko* – Jesus uses this word three times, v. 10, 11, 12) Literally it means to chase or flee. It points to the physical mistreatment that is designed to drive people away. Early Christians were chased from their homes, and physically driven from their families.

1. The Greek verb is a passive perfect participle, which can be translated “allow themselves to be persecuted”. It indicates a willingness to be continuously persecuted or driven away. Are we willing to accept whatever righteous living demands?

a. The second-century writer Tertullian was once approached by a man who said, *“I have come to Christ, but I don’t know what to do. I have a job that I don’t think is consistent with what Scripture teaches. What can I do? I must live”* Tertullian replied, *“Must you?”* To endure persecution is to be prepared for loneliness, misunderstanding, ridicule, rejection, and unfair treatment of every sort.

C. **Slander** (*Say all manner of evil against you falsely*) This is perhaps the hardest to take: when your enemies create lies about you, and attempt to ruin your reputation. They accuse falsely. Again, Jesus faced this often. The enemies of Jesus brought false witnesses to testify against Him.

VI. The Reward of Persecution: As with the other beatitudes, the spiritual quality mentioned brings its own reward.

A. **“Blessed are” – v. 10** – means those who are persecuted find fulfillment or happiness. They find a true source of joy in the opportunity to follow Jesus where He leads.

- Paul called on Timothy to *“not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God,”* (2 Tim. 1:8)
- James calls on the Christian to *count it all joy* when his faith is tested by difficulties, because it improves our character and provides what we lack.(James 1:2)
- Peter declares the true value of suffering for the sake of righteousness. It is pleasing to God. – **1 Peter 2:19-21** – *19 For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. 20 For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. 21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:*

B. **“Theirs is the kingdom of heaven” – v. 10; great is your reward in heaven” – v. 12)** – The ultimate fruit of kingdom life is eternal life. Persecution can take from us every possession, every freedom, and every comfort, and even take our physical life, but it can never take away the spiritual life we have in Christ. The Beatitudes begin and end with the promise of the kingdom of heaven (cf. v. 3) We close our

thoughts with some of the most powerful, yet comforting words in scripture. **Rom 8:18** – 8 *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us....* **vs. 31-39** – 31 *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." 37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The Christians in Fort Myers regularly study together, pray together, and encourage one another in our walk with the Lord. We would be delighted to have you join us in these endeavors!