

TRUTH

“... Your word is truth” (John 17:17)

August 2025

“BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS’ SAKE”

The full text of Matthew 5:10-12 reads:

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.

This portion of Jesus’ message is a big change from the instruction found in verses 3-9. The words of verses ten to twelve are not about a disciple pursuing meekness or a merciful and pure heart. No, they are about being happy and feeling blessed though we are mistreated, even persecuted, for the Master’s sake.

According to our Lord, who is the disciple who will be blessed/happy? It is not simply one who is persecuted; rather, it is the person who is persecuted “for righteousness’ sake” (5:10). Or, as Jesus went on to say, it is the one who is persecuted for His sake (5:11). In short, the blessed/happy follower of Jesus is one who is mistreated for doing what is right in God’s sight, which is serving and being loyal to His Son.

Is every person who is persecuted a saved servant of God? No. In some cases, those who are mistreated make no claim to adhere to the Bible and follow the Christ. They may be persecuted because of their belligerent spirit, provocative words, disgusting conduct, or for propagating a false religious message. The bottom line: being persecuted is no guarantee that the one who is persecuted is a person who is pleasing to God and is heaven-bound.

During the Old Testament era, at times God’s faithful servants were persecuted (Matthew 5:12). That is what happened to Abel, Moses, Caleb and Joshua, as well as a number of prophets, including Elijah, Michaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and others. And why were they pursued and tormented by others? Because of their devotion to God.

What about the first-century saints? It was very common for them to face persecution when they proclaimed and lived the gospel. We see that throughout the book of Acts, first with the apostles, then the entire church in Jerusalem and other places

(Acts 8:1,3). Some early Christians were blasphemed (1 Peter 4:3,4). Some were beaten (Acts 5:40). Some, like Steven and Paul, were stoned (Acts 7:58; 14:19). Being a follower of the risen Lord of lords is not for little kids or the faint of heart!

How should devoted disciples of Jesus respond when they are persecuted for His sake? He said, “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad . . .” (Matthew 5:12). Wait, the proper response to living for the Master is *what*?! Jesus wants us to rejoice because of it and be extremely glad! In our frailty, we may be tempted to complain when persecution comes our way. We may be tempted to have doubts about God, the Scriptures, and the blessings we have through our Savior. Know this: complaining, doubting, and retaliating are *not* acceptable reactions on our part.

When the Christians in Thessalonica faced “persecutions and tribulations” (2 Thessalonians 1:4), how did they respond? The Bible says they endured them (1:4). What else? In the midst of such unpleasant trials, their faith grew exceedingly, and their love abounded (1:3). Good for them! What a wonderful example for every generation of Christians! Instead of wavering in their devotion to the Lord or threatening to quit, they did more than survive . . . they thrived!

What are some modern-day forms of persecution which God’s people might face? There are different kinds and levels of persecution, depending on the culture and extent of hatred in the heart of those who do the persecuting. Some persecutors mock us for taking our stand on God’s truth. Others may shun us. Some spread lies about us and the church. There are disciples who are abused mentally and physically by unbelieving spouses or parents. Some Christians lose their jobs or are not allowed to advance in their career because they refuse to compromise God’s truth. In rarer cases, Christians are imprisoned or threatened with extreme physical punishment.

Is it worth it to suffer for Jesus’ sake? Absolutely! He said the reward will be great in heaven for His sufferers (Matthew 5:12). “. . . the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

-- Roger D. Campbell

TAKEAWAYS FROM 2 SAMUEL 15-16

In this section of history, we read of an escalation of problems in the nation of Israel, as well as within King David's own family. In particular, these two chapters record that David's beloved son, Absalom, became an adversary and troublemaker in Israel.

Because of his good looks and unblemished outward appearance, Absalom made an impression on the Israelites (2 Samuel 14:25,26). Sadly, he had no real inward beauty, which is what matters most to the Lord (1 Peter 3:3,4). Let us not forget that truth.

By passing himself off as someone who cared about the people and could empathize with their challenges, Absalom was able to gain their favor. The man was as slick as some modern-day politicians who care only about their own selfish interests (15:1-5). What was Absalom able to accomplish? "*Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel*" (15:6). In the end, he got what he wanted, as David was told: "*The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom*" (15:13).

Absalom rebelled against his father, propagating this message about himself: "*Absalom reigns in Hebron*" (15:10). The text plainly depicts what was taking place: Absalom sent "spies" throughout Israel to push his cause (15:10), and "*the conspiracy grew strong*" (15:12). The man was a traitor to both his family and his country.

It is an undeniable fact that Absalom *was influential* with people (15:1-13). He was able to persuade them to do what he wanted them to do. They followed him. What does that say about him? Answer: he was a leader. No, not a godly one, but a leader nonetheless. This account reminds us that just because a leader has a big following, that by no means proves that he is pleasing to God. Absalom had a big followship (15:12), but he was far from being a spiritually-minded and righteous person.

As a leader, Absalom had a false humility. He called himself a servant, but he clearly was *not* a servant of the people (15:2; Romans 16:18).

Absalom gave a false sense of compassion (15:3,4). In reality, he was not other-people oriented: everything that he did was all about Mr. Absalom. He made great promises, saying if he were judge in the land, he would provide justice (15:4). However, his life showed that he was a hypocrite. Absalom kissed folks who came to him (15:5), but he did not really care about their needs. He further showed himself to be deceitful when he used spies and concealed his true motives (15:7-10).

Absalom was disrespectful — disrespectful to his father, his family, his nation, and Jehovah. His attitude and conduct were despicable. Yet, he showed no sense

of shame (cf. Jeremiah 6:15). Many today live in open immorality and rebellion against God, but, like Absalom, they do not blush. How tragic.

In the next section of chapter fifteen, we read of David's forced exit from Jerusalem due to the genuine threat of Absalom attacking the city (15:13-32). It is a sad picture, indeed. As David departed, he did not know where he was headed (15:20). Picture it: the Lord's anointed had no apparent plan and an uncertain future. Yes, it was a day of mourning in Israel: "*And all the country wept with a loud voice*" (15:23).

David realized that his fate was in the hands of the Lord (15:25,26). The monarch whom God chose to be ruler over His people, walked out of Jerusalem in tears, barefooted, and with his head covered (15:30).

In the past, a man by the name of Ahithophel had been David's counselor. When Absalom's political aspirations picked up speed, Ahithophel betrayed David and became a supporter of Absalom. David then prayed that God would turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness (15:31).

For David, things were going from bad to worse. Do you recall what the prophet Nathan had revealed to the king after his misstep with Bathsheba? He told David that he would face adversity from his own house (12:11). That is exactly what transpired. King, that lustful night you enjoyed with another man's wife, you are paying for it now. Was it worth it?!

Chapter 16 highlights — Shimei, a man from Saul's family, cursed David, and Ahithophel gave his initial counsel to Absalom about how to help strengthen the commitment of his followers.

In more than one instance, David showed fleshly tendencies. But, when Shimei cursed the king, David exercised restraint, as he neither railed on nor punished the man (16:5-12). Self-control is priceless, and God wants all of us to practice it . . . at all times.

In chapter sixteen, we further see Absalom depicted as a ruthless, self-centered, live-by-fleshly-lusts type of person. He desired to kill his own father (16:11). In fulfillment of Nathan's prophecy, he openly slept with David's concubines (16:22). And, to no one's surprise, Absalom was not ashamed to let others know about his intentional immorality (16:22).

The message of 2 Samuel 15-16 has "division" written all over it. When a nation or family is divided, there is great pain for everyone involved. How awful that David's own son, to whom the king had done no wrong, sought to kill him (16:11). Our hearts go out to those people who are forced to deal with conflict and unrest in their families. Life is not always fun, is it?

-- Roger D. Campbell

Practical Suggestions about Dating/Courting

Though the particulars vary, virtually every age and culture had/has/will have various dating or courtship traditions for single individuals seeking to enter into marriage. Thankfully, the Bible is timeless and offers sound advice on all things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). So, what are some practical, biblical suggestions about dating/courtship for those seeking to live godly lives?

❖ **Be intentional.** One must determine the purpose of dating/courtship. For many (even some Christians, sadly) dating's purpose is to engage in illicit, sinful behavior (often with as many partners as possible). But when dating's purpose is to get to know a person and determine compatibility—all within the confines of pure, godly behavior—one is *biblically* intentional in the process. Too many date/court just because “that is what everyone else is doing.” Faithful Christians, however, are intentional in their lives, seeking to do all by the authority of Jesus (Colossians 3:17) and to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

❖ **Be resolute.** There are certain human traits to be desired and sought after, while there are other traits to be avoided at all costs. Know which are which and refuse to compromise. Determine not to date/court one who is (1) sinful (1 Corinthians 15:33), (2) selfish/self-centered (Philippians 2:3), (3) stubborn (Proverbs 8:33), slothful (Proverbs 21:25), or self-indulgent (Ephesians 5:22,25). Wise, godly people resolve to avoid these ungodly traits themselves and refuse even to date/court those who possess such.

❖ **Be prudent.** The book of Proverbs twice says, “*A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished*” (Proverbs 22:3; 27:12). Being prudent means avoiding situations that increase temptation. Prudence may mean dating takes place in public settings, making wiser choices with regard to entertainment (movies, television shows, music, etc.), or identifying a potentially tempting situation and fleeing (like Joseph did, Genesis 39). Prudence means knowing oneself and acting so as to maintain purity, for “*a fool rages and is self-confident*” (Proverbs 14:16). Let the wise beware!

It should be remembered that dating/courting has only two possible outcomes: (1) marriage or (2) breaking off the relationship. The wise, godly person realizes he may be spending time with someone else's future spouse. By acting with biblical intentionality, a resolute mindset, and prudence, one ensures that, regardless, he/she has obeyed God's will and helped another soul to do so as well.

-- Chad Dollahite

Which Christians should take a leading role in worship assemblies?

In our worship to the Lord, rather than be chaotic or haphazard, we strive to “*Let all things be done decently and in order*” (1 Corinthians 14:40). With that in mind, when we engage in prayers, singing, or other acts of worship in our assemblies, someone takes the lead. Who should play that role?

The one who takes a leading role should be a Christian. New Testament references to worship assemblies speak about the participants being members of Jesus' church (1 Corinthians 1:2; 11:18,20; 14:20,26; Acts 20:7).

Worshipping the Lord is a great honor (Psalm 95:6). So is being asked to lead His people in worship. Only those who take their task of leading seriously should be asked to serve as a leader in worship.

Worship leaders should be those who are ready and willing to lead. A person may not yet feel comfortable to lead in an assembly if he was baptized only a few days ago. Let us be thoughtful (Philippians 2:4) and not pressure someone to do something that he is not yet mentally prepared to do.

If it is a mixed assembly of Christians (meaning males and females are present), it should be males/brothers who serve as leaders. God's plan is “*that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting*” (1 Timothy 2:8). In this verse, the word “men” comes from a Greek word (“ἀνὴρ/anēr) which means males; so, males lead. In the same context, it is written that women are not permitted “*to have authority over a man*” (2:12) in a spiritual setting. Such instructions are neither opinions nor “mere tradition.” No, Paul charged Timothy, “*These things command and teach*” (4:11).

What kind of brother should be enjoined to lead in a worship assembly? He should be holy (1 Timothy 2:8). God's ears are open to the prayers of the *righteous* (1 Peter 3:12), and the fervent prayer of a *righteous* man avails much (James 5:16). So, let the leader be a *righteous* brother! Some clarity: “*He who practices righteousness is righteous*” (1 John 3:7). Let every local church determine to select only those who are faithfully walking with God to lead in worship.

The ones who lead in worship ought to be brothers who set the right example outside of a worship assembly by being a pattern of good conduct at home, at work, at school, and in the community (Titus 2:7).

Think of different Bible characters who were men of prayer, godly men like Moses, Samuel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, and Paul. Christian brothers who imitate those servants of Jehovah are the type of men who should be asked to lead God's church in worship.

-- Roger D. Campbell

JESUS' CONVERSATION WITH MARTHA (John 11:20-27)

John 11 is a very emotional chapter. It is often famous for having the shortest verse in the English Bible, "*Jesus wept*" (John 11:35). The Son of God shows great emotion in this moment, but there is certainly more to this chapter than just those two words. Jesus was weeping because His friend, Lazarus of Bethany, had died. Both Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha, were dear friends of Jesus (John 11:5). After Lazarus dies, Jesus arrives in Bethany and has a conversation with Martha.

Previously, the sisters had sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was very sick, perhaps hoping Jesus might come heal him from his sickness. However, Jesus did not arrive on the scene until Lazarus had been dead for four days (11:17). And the emotion of this chapter continues during this conversation between Martha and Jesus.

Martha does not wait for Jesus to arrive but goes out to meet Him (11:20). Her first words to Jesus show her great **disappointment** (11:21). She feels great sorrow because of the loss of her brother. Those words seem like a rebuke; however, they also show her faith in the power of Jesus. She knows that Jesus could have saved Lazarus. And she is disappointed because her brother has died.

Martha also shows great **faith** in Jesus as she states, "*But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You*" (11:22). Even though the outcome of this situation is the resurrection of Lazarus, that is not what Martha asks of Jesus. She does not make the request for Jesus to bring Lazarus back from the dead. But she certainly knows that He has the ability to do so.

Jesus then makes a statement of **comfort** as He states, "*Your brother will rise again*" (11:23). With only these five words, Jesus gives some form of comfort to Martha. Jesus does not say that He will rise again on that very same day. Martha acknowledges that she believes in the truth of the resurrection of the dead *one* day, or *some* day in the future (11:24). Jesus had previously discussed this very thing in John 5:26-29.

This part of the conversation mirrors statements that are made at funeral services today. We try to comfort the living family of a deceased, faithful Christian by encouraging them to think about the peace that their loved one might now feel since they have passed from this life of suffering into an eternity with God the Father. You might imagine

that Martha was feeling some comfort thinking of a future day.

What follows is something that should not be missed, because Jesus interjects **power** into the conversation! He says, "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live*" (11:25). Jesus has the power over death and life. As humans, we often try to control physical death. We do all we can to avoid it. But Jesus is saying that through His power, physical death is not the most important thing. Believers may die, but because of the power of Jesus and the resurrection of the dead, death is something through which one passes on the way to further life and fellowship with God!

For the person who believes in Jesus and is obedient to the gospel, there is an eternal life that goes beyond the things of this world. Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1), but death cannot separate us from Him (Romans 8:38,39).

Now Jesus is going to conclude His side of this conversation with a question. It is not just any question, but it is a question that continues to echo through time. It is a question that all accountable people must give an answer for, even today. That question is simply, "*Do you believe this?*" (11:26).

Peter is often given great credit for His response to Jesus in Matthew 16:16. And while that *is* a great statement of faith, Martha's final statement in this conversation is one of the greatest statements of **belief** in all of Scripture. "*Yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is come into the world*" (John 11:27).

Martha says so much in so few words. She gives affirmation that she believes, "*Yes, Lord*". She shows her belief that He is the Messiah, "*You are the Christ*". She shows her belief that He is divine, "*... the Son of God*."

There are so many great things to consider from John 11. I would encourage a deeper study of all the things that take place here. But, two great lessons from this conversation stand out: the great power of Jesus over physical death and the great statements of faith about Jesus made by Martha.

-- Joel Danley

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