

## **Persecution and Reward In The Kingdom**

### **Matthew 5:10-12**

#### **Introduction**

We have been studying the Sermon on The Mount or the King's Constitution. The theme: real righteousness. In this Sermon Jesus describes conduct that comes from character. "Character always comes before conduct, because what we are determines what we do" (Wiersbe; *New Testament Outlines*; p.27). The teaching of Jesus invites us to examine our attitude about ourselves, others and the world. What have we learned? Both righteousness and sin are first inward and then outward. Who are the blessed? Those who sense their sin and recognize their ruin and run to the arms of God. The poor in spirit admit spiritual bankruptcy; they do not simply admit their need but they are willing to do something about it (v.3). The sinner mourns, expresses true sorrow for sin (v.4). The sinner admits dependence upon God in every area of life (v.3) and then mourns or grieves over the nature of sin and consequences of sin; personal sin in my life; sin in this world; we then submit to the authority of God in their lives. We are meek (v. 5); teachable, unwilling to defend ourselves in our sin; willing to admit our sin and turn from sin. We hunger and thirst for righteousness; we long for God; we long for His righteousness and by faith we ask for it (v.6). We cultivate a forgiving spirit, love and a willingness to offer resources to the undeserving (v.7). We are merciful (v.7); we are pure in heart (v.8); willing to keep our lives clean; pure because we see God; unwilling to accept substitutes for holiness. We are peacemakers, not trouble makers, pointing people to God, since humanity is in rebellion (v.9). What happens when we deny ourselves; oppose Satan and confront the world in all the lost people in it? We invite persecution.

The poor in spirit depend on God.

The sinner grieves over personal sin in both self and others.

The meek willingly live under the authority of God.

The hunger and thirst for righteousness builds, grows, and comes from God.

The merciful give undeserved relief in the face of heartbreaking misery and pain.

The pure in heart are clean on the inside and wish to see God's will come to pass.

The peacemakers are working hard to reconcile broken people to their God.

Both Satan and the World praise pride and despise humility. Both Satan and the World envision a world where there is no consequence for rebellion and sin. The Lord God wants to reconcile His enemies and make them children. But now Jesus tells us to expect persecution. If we think the way God wants us to think and live the way Christ calls us to live, we can expect opposition, persecution. We will suffer, but we must make sure our suffering is not the consequences of our own wicked or foolish behavior. So what can we expect from the world? Jesus says; 'happy are the harassed'. This beatitude might be the most difficult of all. Suffering, pain, persecution, opposition, are not on most people's wish list for the New Year. The world has already rejected humility, mourning over sin, gentleness, righteousness, mercy, purity of heart and peacemaking holiness.

Jesus will speak of **the reality of persecution (v.10); the reason for persecution (v.11) and the reward for persecution (v.12).**

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#### **The Reality Of Persecution (v.10)**

*Matthew 5:10–12 (NKJV)* *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

The people being harassed are the citizens of the kingdom; those who have embraced the articles of the King's Constitution. Paul wrote; "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim.3:12). Paul warned Timothy (vv.3:10-11); "But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconic, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me."

Persecution is a reality for those who live in opposition to Satan and this world. Our goal is to become like Christ. To reflect His love and cultivate His character and walk. Jesus lived to fulfill God's will. The Apostles and early church Fathers who walked with Jesus faced persecution. The writer of Hebrews wrote; "Consider Jesus who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (12:3).

Righteousness is confrontational. In a book entitled *Children's Letters to God*, children under the age of 6 asked God questions. Larry wrote; "Dear God, Maybe Cain and Abel would not kill each other so much if they had their own rooms. It works with my brother." Larry cares about social violence and domestic harmony! But Abel did not preach to Cain, he simply lived in opposition to Cain's man made religion. And Cain hated his brother for it! When Moses choose to identify with the despised and rejected children of Israel, he drove a wedge in his Egyptian pagan past.

The first stage of persecution is opposition; ridicule Christ, ridicule His church, ridicule His followers. Attack Christians in the media, silence Christians in public forums; silence Christians in the schools.

Persecution has been a reality for Christians in very generation. Thomas Watson the Puritan writer said; "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 their cross. The way to heaven is by way of thorns and blood. . .Set it down as a maxim, if you follow Christ you must see the swords and staves".

What is it about hardship that allows us to know the Lord Jesus more deeply? What is it about hardship and persecution that causes us to explore who God really is?

The Bible indicates that godly persecution is persuasive evidence of salvation. Paul sent Timothy to the Thessalonians "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

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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).

We are to expect persecution. What I am going to say will perhaps disturb some. If you have never received ridicule, criticism, or rejection because of your faith, you have every reason to question what kind of faith you have! In Philippians Paul wrote (1:29-30); “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me”.

Persecution is a badge of identity and destiny, as much as it is a badge of identity and destiny of those who persecute you! Tertullian was a Christian leader in the second century. A man came to him and 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 Scriptures teach. What can I do? I must live! To that Tertullian replied, “must you?” Loyalty to Jesus is the only option for the Christian. To be prepared for the Kingdom, you must be prepared to be lonely, misunderstood, rejected and ridiculed.

If you say no to a hating and impure world; they will hate you. What happens if you live a life of purity, integrity, peace? People hate a righteous life. It exposes unrighteousness.

### **The Reason For Persecution (v.11)**

*11 “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.*

What was the reason for persecution in verse 10? Righteousness. What is the reason for persecution in verse 11? *“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely. . .for My sake”*. Jesus. The more you identify with Jesus—the more you act like Jesus, the more you will be treated like Jesus. Religious leaders often responded to Jesus with accusation, hate, fear, suspicion. Jesus says, expect insult, expect, slander, expect persecution. **Here for the first time, Jesus puts Himself in the Sermon.**

What will loyalty and obedience to Jesus bring? Slander. Persecution. History confirms this. Read Fox’s Book of Martyrs. The world continues to slander, persecute, jail, and kill Christ’s followers.

The very definition of righteousness (v.10) is everything Jesus says and does. No wonder righteousness and Jesus brings persecution.

Who are the persecuted? “Blessed are you”—they are believers; who face hardship, torture, imprisonment or death because of their faith in Christ (for My sake). They are found everywhere in this world. Christians face severe hostility and are often deprived of justice.

Persecution begins with opposition (v.10) and continues with slander (v.11).

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To revile is to insult—and to say all kinds of evil falsely is slander. There is no honor or reward for being persecuted for being weird. Christians can be persecuted for living or behaving righteously; and for being weird. Jon Courson tells the story of living in San Jose where a couple of ladies preached the gospel visually by taking off their clothes and spreading mustard on their bodies, to illustrate faith like a mustard seed. When they were arrested, they claimed they were being persecuted for righteousness sake. No they weren't. They were being arrested because they broke the Law and were weird.

If you stand for Jesus; in your home, in your school, in your job, in your community, in the political or social systems; I guarantee you will be persecuted. Jesus promised physical persecution. The word persecuted means chased, harassed, abused, afflicted with unjust treatment. Revile means insults. The literal meaning is to cast in the teeth—or in our modern culture—get in one's face. It means to throw abusive words in your face, to mock viciously.

Do you still want a passport into God's Kingdom? Expect verbal abuse. In over 50 countries Christians are facing sustained abuse. Christians are beheaded and crucified in those areas where ISIS controls territory in the Middle East. North Korea tops the list of persecuting Christians; profound abuse takes place in Saudi Arabia and Iran. Our government calls for sanctions against North Korea when they insult a Hollywood Film Maker or threaten violence in movie theaters.

Where are the calls for sanctions against the murder, torture, incarceration of Christians?

When we as Christians or as a Church act like the world, we only succeed in hiding heaven on earth. When the world is pleased with the Church; we can be sure God is not pleased. When the world is displeased with the Church, we can be sure God is pleased.

“all kinds of things falsely” or abusive things behind our backs. The religious leaders will accuse Jesus of being a glutton and a drunkard (wine-bibber; Matt.11:19). Slander behind the back is harder to take because it is harder to defend. But instead of grief and regret—we rejoice. We did something right. One of the greatest blessings; proof of Christ's presence in our lives, is that we are cursed for his sake.

Why am I being persecuted? Again—a person can stand for high morals and even religious ideals. You can be accepted. But if you dare say that Jesus alone provides the basis for a right relationship with God you will light a fire in the belly of the unbeliever. If you dare say, “there is no other name given under Heaven whereby men must be saved” (Acts 4:12) prepare for fire works. Identification with Jesus will bring response. What happens if you identify with failed and flawed views of Marx, Freud, Dewey, or Darwin? You are seen as educated, erudite, enlightened. Mention Jesus—open hostility.

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The world will hate you because it hates Jesus. Satan hates you because you love Jesus. Satan fears you when you act like Jesus. Satan will embark on a campaign of persecution when you become effective in your witness for Christ!

In the book of Acts 8:33a; we read, “In his humiliation (Jesus) was deprived of justice.” Persecution begins with opposition, continues with personal slander, is further nurtured by injustice or discrimination. Christians are consigned to second-class citizenship; seen as enemies of the state; pushed away; denied jobs, or governmental positions. Christians must pay a special tax or the daughters can be abducted or enslaved. Father and mothers cannot receive justice from the courts because they are Christians.

In Hebrews 13:3; “Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.” Christians are in jails in North Korea, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, India, Pakistan.

### **The Reward For Persecution (v.12)**

*12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

A preacher quit the ministry after 20 years and became a funeral director. When asked why he changed, he said, “I spent 3 years trying to straighten out John and John’s still a drunk. Then I spent 6 months trying to straighten out Susan’s marriage and she filed for divorce. Then I spent 2 years trying to straighten out Bob’s drug problem, and he’s still an addict. Now at the funeral home when I straighten them out—they stay straight.

Our reward is not always here or now.

“... *for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you*”. Do you know what that means? When we suffer for Jesus’ sake we are in the best company—ever. We stand in the company of the prophets of old! Persecution is mark of faithfulness—a hallmark of genuine joy! When we suffer for Jesus sake we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that we belong to Him!

Think about what Jesus is saying; when you are persecuted you receiving the same response that Moses received, that Isaiah and Jeremiah received. And of course Daniel.

The King of Babylon was manipulated and deceived into making a decree that no one could pray or petition any deity other than himself. Daniel in spite of the decree. He was aware that he was breaking the king’s decree. He was cast into a lion’s den.

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You have a present reward; a millennial reward and an eternal reward. Not every believer is rewarded in this life with all the things of this life. But we can all have Christ's joy and Christ's comfort, and Christ's strength.

Look at the words of Jesus; "great is your reward in heaven". We are promised a great reward as we follow in the footsteps of the Old and New Testament Saints.

We might think of it as crass or opportunistic to speak of rewards—but Jesus is not stingy! What are the consequences of righteousness? What payment might we expect? Persecution in this world. Reward in Heaven. What kind of reward? Permanent recognition! In the next chapter (6:1) Jesus will say, "take care! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired, then you will lose your reward from your Father in heaven"! The Lord will reward us abundantly, according to His standards! Jesus speaks of anyone giving up houses, lands, brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, will receive a hundred times as much in return and will have eternal life (Matt. 19:29). It's easy to do what's right to receive recognition and praise in this life! But what if the only person who knows the truth is your heavenly Father? Jesus will later call us to check our motives in the areas of generosity (6:2-4); prayer (6:5-6) and fasting (6:16-18).

But will you forfeit eternal rewards for temporary convenience?

How can we ignore Christ's emphasis in these few verses? Jesus speaks of righteousness (v.6); peace (v.9); joy (v.12). Could it be that Paul had this very verse in mind when he wrote; "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"(Rom.14:17).

## **Conclusion**

What can we do? We can remember those in prison as if you were there fellow prisoners. When persecuted Christians are asked what can we do their first answer is pray. For prisoners who are isolated, cut off from fellowship, they long for that life-line of worship and fellowship. John Bunyon wrote (from jail); "Were it lawful, I could pray for greater trouble for greater comfort sake."

At this very moment there are 100 million Christians living in areas where they face constant persecution. There are 400 million living under the threat of persecution.

You have brothers and sisters suffering all over the globe. Wouldn't you like to know more? We can provide them with prayer, and Bibles. Brother Andrew used to say; "Prayer isn't preparation for the battle; it is the battle." One Russian Pastor—nearly crippled for not giving up his Bible said, " I could go to prison for having this book, but this book can also set men free." One

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Russian prisoner in Siberia said, “I wish I knew what was on the next page” (after receiving only one page from a Bible).

Eric Metaxes and John Stonestreet offer a number of resources to help advocate for religious freedom. We can visit them in prison. We can support people like Nagmeh Abedini as she continues to work for her husband’s release. We can volunteer or contribute to organizations on the frontline; like Gospel for Asia, Open Doors with Brother Andrew; the Barnabas Fund; Christian Freedom International; Secret Believers; and Voice of the Martyrs.

Wang Mingdao was thrown into a prison at the age of 60 years old. He was a well known Bible teacher, evangelist and Christian worker. He wanted to preach more sermons, write more books, reach more people with the gospel. But he found himself in a lonely dark cell with no pen, no paper no books, no people. He had nothing to do except to get to know His Lord. And so he did. He later wrote, “and for twenty years that was the greatest relationship I have ever known. But the cell was the means.” His advice to believers; “ I was pushed into a cell, but you will have to push yourself into one. You have no time to know God. You need to build yourself a cell so you can do for yourself what persecution did for me—simplify your life and know God”.