

## BLESSED ARE THE PERSECUTED

**Text: Matthew 5:10-12**

**Key Word:** Persecuted

**Key Thought:** There Is a Proper Way to Respond When We Are Persecuted

"The Christian life is full of paradoxes that are quite insoluble to human reason, but are easily understood by the spiritual mind."

Arthur W. Pink  
"The Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer"  
p. 55

How can we rejoice with a joy that is unspeakable and yet also mourn with a lamentation that is beyond words. We have been brought into a vibrant relationship which is depicted as being closer than a brother (Proverbs 17:17) and yet we pant and yearn for God like a deer does for streams of water (Psalm 42:1).

How can we sing and make melody in our hearts to the Lord and yet groan inwardly as we eagerly wait for our adoption as sons and daughters, the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:23). Many Christians face times of pain and perplexity and yet they would not trade these times for all the gold in the world. Why does life contain such paradoxes of truth?

Why is it that certain Scriptures have to be included as the Word of God.

*"In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."*

*II Timothy 3:12*

*"For it has been granted on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him."*

*Philippians 1:29*

Why was it that Cain slew Abel, because his own works were evil while his brother's were righteous (I John 3:12). Joseph was cast into a cistern and shortly after sold to the Ishmaelites and later to Potiphar (Genesis 37,39). Moses was reviled over and over again by the people he served and gave his life for (Exodus 5:21; 14:11; 16:2; 17:2; etc). Samuel was rejected when he became old (I Samuel 8:5); Elijah was despised by king Ahab for standing for truth (I Kings 18:18); Nehemiah was oppressed and defamed while leading the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 4).

In the New Testament we read how our Saviour was put to a cursed death on a rugged cross; Stephen was stoned for proclaiming the gospel (Acts 7); Peter and John were cast into prison for preaching about our resurrected Lord (Acts 4:3) while James, the brother of John was put to death with the sword (Acts 12:2).

The words of Jesus to His disciples just prior to His death offer us a few answers to these paradoxes.

*"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."*

*John 15:19,20*

Paul also made it very clear when he wrote,

*"the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."*

*Romans 8:7*

**Jesus highlighted three specific areas that persecution will take place.**

**1. Insults (reviling)** - this speaks of verbal abuse.

**2. Persecution** - this word means *"to pursue."* It includes harassment, trouble or molesting. It can include being hunted down and then handed over for punishment as Saul did to the early church prior to his conversion.

**3. Evil speaking** - this is when someone's character is defamed.

One thing that must be said is that this must only be *"for righteousness sake"* or *"for My sake."* We should be careful not to confuse this with problems created by our misconduct.

*"But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God."*

*I Peter 2:20*

The early church faced many extreme types of persecution. Some suffered the kind of death of being flung to the lions or were burned at the stake. Emperor Nero had Christians wrapped in pitch and set them alight to become living torches for his gardens. He sewed them in the skins of wild animals and set his hunting dogs upon them to tear them apart. They were tortured on the rack; scraped with pincers; molten lead was poured hissing upon them; red hot brass plates were affixed to the tenderest parts of their bodies; eyes were torn out; parts of their bodies were cut off and roasted before their eyes; their hands and feet were burned while cold water was poured over them to lengthen the agony. The list goes on and on.

History has not changed the abuses against those who have taken their stand for Christ.

### 4318 Wearing Out the Hammers

\*\*\* The French reformer, Theodore Beza, made a famous retort to King Henry of Navarre.

*"Sire, it is truly the lot of the Church of God, for which I speak, to endure blows and not to strike them. But may it please you to remember that it is an anvil which has worn out many hammers."* \*\*\*

### 3337 The Catacombs

\*\*\* During the years of the martyrs Christians fled into the underground caverns outside Rome in almost 600 miles of mole-like tunnels.

Ten generations of Christians were buried in the catacombs during approximately 300 years of suppression. No one knows the exact number, but archaeologists estimate between 1,750,000 and 4,000,000 Christians were interred in the dark tunnels.

Inscriptions of Scripture can still be seen on the catacomb walls. One of the most frequent inscriptions is the sign of the fish. But the inscription which best describes their faith says: "The Word of God is not bound." \*\*\*

**There were several areas of life which the Christians had to make a choice in What and Who they would stand for.**

#### 1. Their Christianity Disrupted Their Work

What if you were a stone-mason and asked to build a temple to a heathen god? Or perhaps you were a tailor who had just received a contract to produce robes for heathen priests? The early Christians found it very hard to work and maintain a full loyalty to Christ.

## **1. Their Christianity Disrupted Their Work (Contd.)**

One day a man came to Tertullian telling of the predicament he found himself in. This man ended his thoughts by saying "What can I do? I must live!" Tertullian replied, "Must you?" If it came down to a choice between loyalty to God or making a living, the true Christians kept their loyalty to God.

## **2. Their Christianity Disrupted Their Social Life**

In the ancient world most feasts were held in the temple of some god. A sacrifice would proceed any festive activity. During this time a few hairs from the forehead of the sacrifice were burned as a symbolic sacrifice. Part of the meat was given to a heathen priest while the rest was returned to the worshipper. It was with this portion that the invited guests would dine upon.

One of the gods they worshipped was called "**Serapis.**" When the invitations were sent out, they would read: "I invite you to dine with me at the table of our Lord Serapis." Before the feast began a cup of wine was poured out in honour of the gods. True Christians would not enter such places.

## **3. Their Christianity Disrupted Their Homes**

Problems arose the moment one member of the family became a Christian. Husbands and wives usually divorced their Christian spouse. Children became the outcast of their once close-knit family. Brothers and sisters were soon at odds with each other. Homes and properties had to be sold because of the splits that formed. It was true that a house divided against itself fell.

**Persecution began for many other reasons as well.**

**1. The Christians were accused of cannibalism.** During the Last Supper the Lord spoke about the bread as being His body and the cup being His blood. This was confused to say that the Christians were practising cannibalism.

**2. The Christians were accused of immoral practises.** This was quite amusing since the Romans/Greeks were well known for their immoral feasts. Christians were falsely accused of orgies during their Love Feasts (the Agape). Christians also commonly greeted each other with a kiss.

**3. The Christians were accused of being agitators.** This came about by twisting their teaching about the End Times. The apocalyptic symbols envisioned the world in flames.

**4. The Christians were accused of being insurrectionists.** The Roman Empire quickly grew to encompass Emperor worship. After all Rome had united the whole world. They had cleared the roads of many of its robbers. Once a year everyone was expected to burn a pinch of incense to the godhead of Caesar and declare: "*Caesar is Lord.*" The crime of Christians was that they placed Christ above Caesar.

It is in this context that Jesus said the Church would be **BLESSED**. In fact, He told them to,

*"Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven . . ."*

*Matthew 5:11a*

The word "**glad**" means to "**leap exceedingly.**" It is that joy that a mountain climber experiences after scaling a mountainside. With all the strength he can muster, he thrusts his body into the air with an exuberant shout of joy.

The Church of Jesus Christ is entering the time of its reward. Not a drop of Christian blood has been shed in vain. Some day soon God's Church shall hear Him say,

*"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."*

*Revelation 14:13*

There are many who have chosen to suffer rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season (Hebrews 11:25). As Peter and John were set free from their prison long ago rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ (Acts 5:41), so let us keep the faith through the persecutions which may be in store for us.

Much of our heritage is still to be gained.

*"Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, **if** indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."*

*Romans 8:17*

C:\My Documents\WPWin(X7)\Sermons.2016\Beatitudes\Matthew 5\_10.12.wpd

Date: Jan 10/16

Place: FCA

Time: 10:30 Am

Song: All He Wants - C

## BLESSED ARE THE PERSECUTED

**Text: Matthew 5:10-12**

**Key Word:** Persecuted

**Key Thought:** There Is a Proper Way to Respond When We Are Persecuted

**Introduction :** *Proverbs 17:17; Psalm 42:1; Romans 8:23; II Timothy 3:12; Philippians 1:29; I John 3:12; Genesis 37,39; Exodus 5:21; 14:11; 16:2; 17:2; I Samuel 8:5; I Kings 18:18; Nehemiah 4; Acts 7; Acts 4:3; Acts 12:2; John 15:19,20; Romans 8:7*

**Jesus highlighted three specific areas that persecution will take place.**

- 1. Insults (reviling)**
- 2. Persecution**
- 3. Evil speaking**

*I Peter 2:20*

**There were several areas of life which the Christians had to make a choice in What and Who they would stand for.**

- 1. Their Christianity Disrupted Their Work**
- 2. Their Christianity Disrupted Their Social Life**
- 3. Their Christianity Disrupted Their Homes**

**Persecution began for many other reasons as well.**

- 1. The Christians were accused of cannibalism.**
- 2. The Christians were accused of immoral practises.**
- 3. The Christians were accused of being agitators.**
- 4. The Christians were accused of being insurrectionists.**

*Matthew 5:11a; Revelation 14:13; Hebrews 11:25; Acts 5:41; Romans 8:17*