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Beverly ECC, Chicago, IL

“THE PERSECUTED”
Matthew 5:10-12

- Matthew 5:10 ~ **“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness.”** {Wright} **“Wonderful news for people who are persecuted because of God’s way!”** {Msg} **“You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution.”**
- Sometimes, Jesus uses figurative language that we are not to take at face value: {Mt 5:29-30} **“If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it outif your right hand causes you to [sin], cut it off”**; and anyone who {Lk 14:26} **“comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, even life itself...cannot be my disciple.”**

This is *not* one of those metaphors. Scholars of every theological persuasion agree that Mt 5:10 is a literal teaching. **“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness”** means what it sounds like.

The one thing to remember regarding basic meaning is that the Lord is speaking of persecution *for being righteous* (v 10), *for following Jesus* (v 11).

- For **“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. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps”** (1 Peter 2:20-21).

The question is: How is this wonderful news? How is persecution for God’s way a blessing?

- What does verse 10 say? **“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”**

This brings to light at least two benefits of being persecuted for following Jesus.

- ☼ 1st, it confirms that we really are citizens of God’s kingdom.

Let’s pull back for a look at the big picture. The Beatitudes paint a word picture of an alternate reality called {Mt 4:17} **“the kingdom of heaven”** (or {Mk 1:15} **“the kingdom of God”**).

This implies that there is another, currently more dominant reality on Earth – and there is. The NT authors call it {Rev 11:15} **“the kingdom of the world.”**

These two realities are poles apart. They began in different ways, they have different kings, their basic operating principles are at odds, the communities they form are drastically unlike, and they are moving toward radically disparate ends.

- **“The kingdom of the world”** is rigidly hostile to **“the kingdom of God”** and its citizens. That is why the Lord Jesus bluntly warns: **“Everyone will hate you because of me”** (Mt 10:22); **“You will be hated by all nations because of me”** (Mt 24:9, 13); and so on.

- ☑ It is conservatively estimated that 200 million Christ Followers {V.O.M.} are currently targeted for intense government-sponsored or community-based persecution. Every day an average of 480 believers

{Statusbericht} are murdered or die as a result of maltreatment.

You and I practice our faith without fear of harassment or violence. But even here there are limits to what is tolerated.

☐ The Lord Jesus commands: {Mt 5:44} **“love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”** How do our friends respond when we take that to heart and speak out against the torture of terrorists?

☐ The Lord Jesus teaches: {Mt 5:9} **“Blessed are the peacemakers.”** How do our neighbors respond when, in obedience to this word, we are willing to die for peace but not to kill for it?

☐ The Lord Jesus says: {Mt 22:21} **“Give...to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”** How do our people respond when we challenge the idolatry of American nationalism?

When faithfulness triggers persecution, it confirms that we are citizens of God’s kingdom. This blessing is of greater worth than earthly security.

⚙ 2nd, being persecuted for Jesus is a catalyst for kingdom growth.

☑ Consider this word from Mumatz Bibi, a Pakistani whose employer beat her into a coma when he found out she is a Christian: {VOM, Special Issue ‘06} **“I thank [those] who are praying for me. I also have a message for them. Please forgive your enemies as Jesus Christ forgave us on the cross.”**

☑ Or this from Chinese pastor Liu Ding. He has been imprisoned and tortured so many times he has lost count, **“But”** and I quote, {VOM, Nov 2005} **“my family has not**

fallen away in the midst of our suffering. Rather, we become bolder following the Lord. Now my children are in the ministry.”

☑ Or this from a pastor in Vietnam: {VOM, special issue ‘08} **“Suffering is not the worst thing that can happen to us. Disobedience to God is the worst thing.”**

☐ These brothers and sisters prove the truth of **Romans 8:28-29** ~ **“In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”** How so? **“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.”**

Persecution for following Jesus makes us more like him as we trust God. Those who **“suffer for doing good and...endure it”** grow in poverty of spirit, godly grief, meekness, hunger and thirst for righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, and peacemaking.

Courageous commitment to Christ is so inspiring that, sometimes, our oppressors even come to faith! Being persecuted for Jesus is a catalyst for kingdom growth – and this blessing is of greater worth than earthly security.

☐ On to Matthew 5:12 ~ **“Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”**

⚙ A 3rd benefit of being persecuted for Jesus is that it assures us of future glory.

□ When Christ returns as {Rev 19:16} **“KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS”** He will sweep away {Eph 5:12} **“the authorities, the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil.”** {Rev 11:15} **“The kingdom of the world”** will **“become the kingdom of our Lord”** and **“he will reign forever and ever.”**

□ Christ Followers who are faithful in persecution will participate in his reign, for {Ro 8:17} **“we are... co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings [so] that we may also share in his glory.”**

Some say this doctrine makes us weak; I believe it makes us strong.

□ Consider Paul’s example. He was misunderstood, slandered, verbally abused, threatened, whipped, beaten with rods, pelted with stones, falsely accused, imprisoned and, finally crucified for Jesus.

Yet, he wrote: {2 Co 4:8-11, 16-17}

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

Therefore we do not lose heart... outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

Do these sound like the words of a weak or passive man? Paul’s assurance of eternal glory made him strong. This blessing is of greater worth than earthly security.

□ **“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness.”**

God never tells us to go looking for persecution. But sometimes, persecution comes looking for us.

□ If it does, let us {Jos 1:6-7, 9} **“be strong and courageous...strong and very courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD [our] God will be with [us].”**

□ Rather than deny Christ, let’s deny ourselves and {Mt 16:24} **“take up [our] cross and follow”** him. He is inviting us to find our lives by losing them for him. {Mt 16:26} **“What good will it be for [us] to gain the whole world, yet forfeit [our souls]?”**

□ When that time comes, {Heb 12:1b-2} **“Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at”** {NLT} **“the place of highest honor beside God’s throne in heaven”.**

{Wright} **“Wonderful news for people who are persecuted because of God’s way!”** {Msg} **“You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution.”**

Matthew 5:10-12 is the Word of the Lord.