

Text: Matthew 5:10-12 (Pew Bible, pg.958)

Title: “Suffering with Christ”

INTRODUCTION

Let's open our Bibles together to Matthew 5:10. Today I'm concluding this series of messages on the radical statements of Jesus, known as the Beatitudes. Stand and read Matthew 5:10-12. Let your eyes rest on those words “theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” That was the blessing in the first statement, and it is the blessing in the last. The Beatitudes reveal the life of people who are following Jesus into the Kingdom of God. Please be seated.

Matthew 5:10 - Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Friends, when we are really walking with Jesus, truly following Him, we will walk with Him into difficult situations where we will, at the very least, find ourselves feeling like we don't belong, and, possibly, in situations where we will be very much in danger. But that is what the Bible promises for Christ-followers.

2 Timothy 3:12 - Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

2 Timothy 3:13 - while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

You see as the time of Jesus' coming again draws near, the opposition to Christ and to the Gospel will grow more intense, even in places like our own nation where we now enjoy a great amount of religious freedom. The Scripture tells us that there is such a tension between the lifestyle of disciples of Jesus on one hand and the attitudes and ways of the world on the other, that friction and even conflict will happen. Look again at the words of Jesus:

Matthew 5:10 - Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Note: This is the last of the radical statements of Jesus known as the Beatitudes. Actually v.10 is the statement, and yet it is the only beatitude that is explained in any kind of detail.

Matthew 5:11 - “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Notice that in v.10, as in the other seven statements, He says “Blessed are *they*” or “blessed are *those*.” In v.11 Jesus says, “Blessed are *you*.” It's like Jesus looks directly into the eyes of His closest followers. He knows what they will face. It's like Jesus says, “Listen carefully. This is what you can expect because you are following me, and living such radically different lives.”

And friends, our Savior is gazing into our eyes today, and He is saying the same thing: “As you follow Me into the radical life of the Kingdom of God, here is what you can expect to happen sooner or later, to one degree or another. Take courage! You are blessed as you suffer with Me.”

1. THE NATURE OF OUR SUFFERING

Matthew 5:10 - Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

And Jesus will use the word “persecuted” in vv.11&12 as well. The word means to pursue. It is a relentless commitment to hurt somebody, to put them down, or to destroy them. It's a very deliberate assault.

The first wave of persecution crashed in over our Savior Jesus with His sufferings, trial and crucifixion. But then we read in Acts how wave after wave of persecution would hit the followers of Jesus. Jewish leaders and Roman authorities viciously fought the church. Wherever the followers of Jesus took the Gospel, they were often met with resistance and sometimes severe persecution. The early church was born into this atmosphere.

Persecution went on throughout church history. There was even a period of hundreds of years where the Church was controlled by a king or an emperor, and the church officials were just puppets of the government to enforce a false Christianity. And those who stood on the Bible and for the Gospel were severely persecuted. And it continues to this day.

ILLUSTRATION – Some of the most intense persecution in the world is happening in India, particularly in the state of Karnataka where our church is working to plant churches in cooperation with the Indian Baptist Society. I received an email this week from Pastor Subba Rao, the director of the IBS. He shares these examples of the persecution that is going on towards believers just in that state: [READ EMAIL](#).

But we don't have to go overseas. It happens here as well:

ILLUSTRATION – Three weeks ago I ran into a friend I hadn't seen in years. He is a converted Muslim who has an extensive ministry of teaching and equipping believers about how to share their faith with Muslims. But in doing that he caught the attention of some radical Muslims. One day three of them showed up on his doorstep right here in the Metroplex and tried to attack his family. They managed to escape, but they had to leave their home and move to an undisclosed location. He even had to change his name because these enemies of the Cross were still looking for him.

Now in v.11 Jesus goes into more detail about persecution:

Matthew 5:11 - “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Persecution has always included such things as death, imprisonment, economic deprivation, and social ostracism. And Jesus does have all this in mind here. But Jesus seems to focus on one kind of persecution, namely verbal assault.

“insult you” – The NASB translates this “cast insults.” And that's pretty accurate ... to hurl abusive words in the face of another. Jesus frequently endured such mocking from his enemies.

“falsely say all kinds of evil against you” – Here the idea seems to be to talk behind someone's back ... to say things that are blatantly untrue. And they did this to Jesus in His last days. Sadly it came from people who were looked on as the most religious people of the day. Imagine that ... insults and speaking evil of other people coming from the mouth of religious people. The spirit of Christ is just the opposite.

Now you may wonder why Christ and His followers would be treated in this way. Well Jesus explains...

2. THE REASON FOR OUR SUFFERING

Matthew 5:10 - Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness...

Matthew 5:11 - “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.”

When Jesus is at the center of your life ... when Jesus flows through your lifestyle ... righteousness is the fruit. Remember what we said about hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Righteousness is the life of God, the life of Christ, in me. And when we live that way we can expect persecution.

ILLUSTRATION – But many of us are “Camo Christians.” We’re saved but we really don’t want others to know it. So we try to live as a camouflaged Christian ... to blend into our surroundings. And Christians like that will never have to worry about persecution. You'll have to worry about other things, but never about being persecuted for Christ's sake. If you keep quiet about your faith, if you laugh at their jokes, and keep quiet when they mock your Lord or take His name in vain, you'll never have to worry about being persecuted. But when you are living for righteousness and for Christ sooner or later it will happen for you as it did for Christ as He lived His life on this earth ... persecution.

Now the Bible talks about the various reasons we may be persecuted:

- **Believers are sometimes persecuted for associating with the people of God.**

Hebrews tells us that Moses, while he was in Egypt, wasn’t ashamed to be associated with the Jews, even though he had been raised in the king’s palace.

Hebrews 11:25 - He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.

Hebrews 11:26 - He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

Students, as you go to school, will you be ashamed to associate with other believers, even if they are not in the popular crowd in your school?

- **Believers are sometimes persecuted for assisting the work of God.**

Again the writer of Hebrews encourages those who were suffering for their faith to remain faithful.

Hebrews 10:32 - Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering.

Hebrews 10:33 - Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated.

Hebrews 10:34 - You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

Friends, don't think this could never happen here in the US. We've already seen the erosion of the climate in our land concerning righteousness. And there will be increasing attempts to silence us; but we must stand strong in the face of it.

- **Believers are sometime persecuted for asserting the truth of God.**

This happened to Jesus.

John 15:24 - If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father.

John 15:25 - But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.'

Ultimately, they hated Jesus "without reason." They hated Him simply because He asserted the truth that exposed their sin.

But Jesus also tells us something about...

3. THE COMPANIONS IN OUR SUFFERING

Now I'll only just mention this but notice what Jesus says:

Matthew 5:12b - In the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

In the OT God called out prophets to be His spokesmen at various times and places. Great prophets whose lives were shining examples to us and whose messages still speak truth to us were harassed and persecuted by their own people in their day.

John 15:18 - “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

Great men like the Apostle Paul felt this treatment. Coming to the end of his life he said, “I have fought the good fight.” He didn’t say “I have danced the good dance.”

And then there’s something here about...

4. THE REACTION TO OUR SUFFERING

So how are we supposed to respond when suffer with Christ?

Matthew 5:12 - Rejoice and be glad...

Both of these are imperatives or commands, not suggestions. And they are in the present tense, meaning we are to keep on rejoicing and keep on being glad. The Bible says to rejoice in the Lord always. Rejoicing is what happens on the inside. Being glad is how it shows on the outside.

Now a little later in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus expands on this. He tells us to pray for those who persecute us.

Matthew 5:44 - But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...

Now you may think this is crazy. Who in their right mind would rejoice and jump up and down for joy when they’re treated in this way? Who in their right mind would love and pray for the people who are hurting them the most? The answer: People who know that this kind of suffering is just a reminder of the great reward that is awaiting them. The reason we can rejoice and be glad in our suffering is because of...

5. THE REWARD FOR OUR SUFFERING

Matthew 5:10 - Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Remember, this is the same blessing that Jesus gave in the first beatitude ... “theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus said, “As you follow Me and suffer with Me in this way, know that you are in the kingdom of heaven, and one day you will enjoy the full benefits of that kingdom for eternity. But then He says...

Matthew 5:12 - Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven,

Jesus speaks the truth. He has seen something and tasted something and knows something about a reality that most people have never tasted or glimpsed. He can say it because he knows that this

"reward in heaven" really is great and that it will more than compensate for any suffering we must endure for Christ.

It's what Jesus was talking about when He said...

Matthew 10:39 - Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

ILLUSTRATION - Who could forget the powerful story of Jim Elliot and his missionary comrades who were speared to death by headhunters in Ecuador? "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Romans 8:17 - 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.

Do you value the glory of Christ in heaven more than you value ease and comfort in this world?

ILLUSTRATION – In 1620 when the Pilgrims landed at what we know today as Plymouth, Massachusetts, most of them were familiar with what we have talked about this morning. Most of them had experienced persecution for their belief in the Word of God and other important doctrines of the faith. Unfortunately the people who persecuted them were more interested in protecting their religious traditions than they were being faithful to the Word of God and the Kingdom of God. So the Pilgrims came to the New World to establish a home where there would be free to live and to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ without restrictions from the state.

When they landed on the shores of the New World they brought with them copies of two of the most important books among faithful believers of the day. Of course they had the Bible. Specifically they had the Geneva Bible, one of the first versions of the Bible in the English language. It was the forerunner of the King James Bible. It had been published in the face of tremendous opposition from the Queen of England, but in exile some faithful scholars hammered out this version of the Bible. But many on the Mayflower probably also possessed another book, perhaps the most widely read book of the day among believers outside of the Bible. The book was entitled *Foxes Book of Martyrs*. I have a paperback edition of this book that was first published 1563. It contained the amazing and inspiring stories of the faithful believers who dared to take the teachings of Jesus' seriously, and order their lives around Him. And they suffered and died for it. That book inspired those who came to America and laid the foundation, not just for a nation under God, but more importantly for a church under Jesus Christ.

That spirit of faithfulness to Jesus is in our spiritual DNA today. Will we walk with Jesus into our world every day with same spirit of faithfulness to Jesus?