
PERSEVERANCE IN THE FACE OF PERSECUTION

Matthew 5:10

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It is very rare to find anyone who likes the idea of suffering.

We all want it easy. We don't like to face troubles, attacks, or problems. It is very normal and okay to feel that way. But allow me to introduce you to a ***seemingly conflicting principle***.

It is conflicting because this is not what any would expect Jesus to promise His disciples and Christians today. Brothers and sisters,

WELCOME TO THE MNISTRY OF PERSECUTION!

This is the eighth and final beatitude. It is the most daring of all. The previous seven beatitudes talk about the character of the Christian.

But this one centers on the attacks Christians must face. It would interest you to know that Christ was not mistaken when he left this for the last. We usually say, *"save the best for the last"*. I think Christ saved the *toughest for the last*. Because this is not an easy task at all.

In fact, a careful study will give one the insight that all the previous beatitudes were meant to lead to this one.

In essence, Christ wanted to build our character first before facing what lies ahead. ***Jesus Christ lays a foundation of being rooted before going far.***

The Christian well built with those seven attributes is set to and will surely face persecution. And being well rooted in those attributes gives one the ability to persevere and overcome such persecutions.

WHAT IS PERSECUTION? Matt. 5:10

Matthew 5:10 says: *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"*.

The word ***"Persecuted"*** translates from the Greek term ***dioko***, which means to be put to flight or pursued with hostility. It also follows that ***"Persecute"*** means to pursue, harass, trouble, to cause harm, affliction, or suffering for someone because we dislike who or what they are.

So, if someone persecutes you it means you stand for something and the person dislikes your stand. A good example is what we see in politics today. You will discover that the corrupt system often tries to bring down someone who stands for the wellbeing of the citizens.

They persecute this person, attack in various forms, and sometimes may even lead to killing such person.

It is that kind of life that Jesus talks about here. He does not sugarcoat what being his disciple entails. It is a challenging life, requiring great personal sacrifice.

WRONG REASONS FOR BEING PERSECUTED

Many believers suffer persecution but for the wrong reasons.

- **Some suffer persecution because they are obnoxious.**

That is, they are overly offensive and objective. They hold their stand in an offensive way. And when you do this, persecution will come but it is not for what Jesus prescribed.

- **Others suffer persecution because they perform poorly on their jobs.**

You cannot blame your inefficiency on your Christian life.

- **Still, others suffer persecution because they lack diplomacy and common-sense courtesy.**

This affects us in our evangelism. We lack the training to approach different kinds of people.

I mean, you meet someone who is busy in the kitchen, moving in and out of the house, and you want the person to stay put and listen to you.

Oh, come on! If that person reacts harshly to you, you are not suffering because you are preaching the gospel.

It is because you lack the right manner of approach.

- **Some Christians are being persecuted because they are just busybodies.**

You criticize when the occasion doesn't call for it. You are so quick to proclaim "I am a member of the one true church", but your life does not portray Christ. Your life lacks the basic elements of Christianity – **Justice, Mercy, and Faith.**

All of these may result in persecution, but we must be careful not to confuse persecution and punishment.

WHY WE WILL BE PERSECUTED

"For Righteousness sake!"
"Righteousness" comes from the Greek word *dikaioyne* (from dikaios).

It means being proper or right in accordance with what God requires. It is the quality of being upright. In its simplest sense, *dikaioyne* conveys the idea of conformity to a standard or norm set by Christ.

So, Jesus is saying that persecution is the result of God's character being seen in the life of the believer. This is where we can say **action speaks louder than words.**

The text is not talking about mere professing that you are a Christian.

How is your lifestyle? If your lifestyle is Christlike, then by all means the world will persecute you.

People will naturally come after you and the values you hold.

Because the world has always hated the word. Jesus knew this when he encouraged his disciples in ***John 15:18 - 19.***

Those who live righteously will face persecution and enjoy the blessings it carries. But the problem now is, like George F. MacLeod said: ***The greatest criticism of the church today is that no one wants to persecute it because there is nothing very much to persecute it about.***

Christians are no longer interested in living Christ-like lives anymore. The danger believers face is that they want to blend in. Our character is no longer making any impact. Our testimony for Christ is so weak that they see us as the same with them.

We want everyone to speak well of us. But Jesus said in ***Luke 6:26***, "*Woe to you when all men speak well of you.*"

When everybody thinks you are wonderful, you are not in the line of the true Christian character.

Rather, you are in the line of the men-pleasers, those who are proclaiming the message the world wants to hear, a message devoid of power and impact.

A message through which the Holy Spirit is not working. To be persecuted for righteousness means that:

- For being humble, attacks will come.
- For expressing dislike for sin, attacks will come.
- When you are meek and lowly in heart, they will come for you.

- When all you want to do is serve God, attend church services, and fellowship with God, they will still come for you.
- If you show mercy to the strong and the weak, you will be persecuted.
- When your desire is to live a life of purity, attacks will come.
- You stand for peace and try to turn chaos to calm, they will attack you.
- You even stand for the mark of Christ, profess your faith in God's power, and preach Christ and Him crucified. They will still attack you.

But Christ says that for all those who are persecuted for these reasons, they are blessed. They should leap for joy. They should give thanks. Because their reward cannot be quantified.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

These persecutions will come in various forms:

- ✚ We will become the object of jokes.
- ✚ We will be excluded socially.
- ✚ We will be passed up for promotions.
- ✚ We may be detained unjustly.

Joseph endured moral persecution when he refused to commit adultery with Potiphar's wife (***Genesis 39.7***).

- ✚ We will be hated because of God's blessings.

Saul persecuted David, not for religious reasons but out of envy, for God had blessed David with success (***1 Samuel 18***).

- ✚ We may even be persecuted within the church:
- ✓ For staying pure – fellow Christians may slander and try to shame you.
- ✓ For speaking the truth – You may be called names and zoned out to feel like a stranger.

Truth be told, some of the greatest persecutions come from the church. Standing for the truth has been so demonized that we now look for

sweet ways to tell the truth or even shrink into our shells and be silent. Beloved, **speaking the truth in love does not mean the hurt will be gone.** *There is a thin line between speaking the truth in love and pleasing the ears of men.* The truth hurts! When spoken, even the elect may come for you, criticize you, zone you out, or even slander you.

HOW TO PERSEVERE IN THE FACE OF PERSECUTION

To persevere in the face of persecution, we must understand that there are three levels of life:

A. **The Human level**: This level returns good for good and evil for evil.

Most people live on this level. Garbage in garbage out. They treat you just as you treat them.

These people have no sense of mercy in their DNA.

B. **The Hellish level**: This level returns evil for good.

This is what Jesus is talking about in **Matthew 5:10**, persecuted for righteousness' sake.

You will do the right thing and still face trouble. People on this level are naturally wicked and hate you for no reason.

C. **The Heavenly level**: To persevere in the face of persecution, you must be on this level.

This level returns good for evil. This is the level we are to live on.

When you are persecuted, learn to return good for evil. **Matthew 5:43-45.**

To be on the Heavenly level we must abide by 3 key principles:

1. **Perspective**: Change your perspective! Instead of viewing persecution as an attack, see it as an opportunity for personal growth (**James 1.2-3; Romans 5.3-5**). Persecution is an avenue for character building.
 - Many of us do not know who we are until attack comes. Sometimes these pressures from others are necessary to reveal what we are.
 - **Pressure reveals the content of the container.**
 - You may think you are meek until you meet an ungrateful person.
 - You may think you are poor in spirit until you have the necessary resources to pride over your sin.
 - You may think you hunger and thirst for righteousness until you are given the offer of a lifetime.

- Persecution is God's way of proving you stand for the mark of Christ.

It is a blessing that persecution shapes our character.

So why not endure, because endurance produces character.

2. **People:** Connect with like-minded people.

Feeling like an outcast is one of the most difficult aspects of persecution.

But don't just embrace the desertion and isolation. Instead, reach out to those who share the faith with you.

3. **Response:** It is tempting to respond to persecution with anger or retaliation.

But meekness (the ability to control your emotions, absorb the blow, and respond gently), mercy (the willingness to exercise clemency to those in your power to punish), and kindness can reinforce your inner strength, ease tensions, and even make peace with those who oppose you.

CONCLUSION

The conditions described in the Beatitudes are usually looked upon as unfortunate. It doesn't seem like any of them would provoke joy. But Jesus wants us to shift our thinking away from the earthly to the heavenly; from the carnal to the spiritual.

We are called to be different from the world — to be like God. Let us strive for spiritual maturity. If we apply each of these characteristics to our lives, they will enrich and bless us in ways more profound and long-lasting than any earthly thing ever can.

We are not here in this world to please other people; we are here to please Jesus.

You have an opportunity today to take a stand for Jesus Christ and receive abundant blessings in the Kingdom of heaven.

May God bless these words in our hearts in Jesus Name. Amen.

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