

Matthew 5:10-12 (NKJV)

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

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

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

Last week we focused largely on what it means to be persecuted for **righteousness' sake**. We talked about the difference between earthly causes and true spiritual ministries. I hope it was a helpful study to discern the difference between the two.

Now where does persecution come from? This is what Jesus said.

John 15:18-21 (NKJV)

18 "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you.

19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

20 Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

21 But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.

Peter expanded on what Christ said in I Peter

1 Peter 4:12-19 (NKJV)

12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;

13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you*. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.

15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters.

16 Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

17 For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what will *be* the end of those who do not obey the

gospel of God?

18 Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

19 Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

What Jesus clearly told us is that if we are **truly** living for him, we will experience **hatred** from people who **hate** Him. And it does not tell us this is some kind of **exception** to the rule. It is predictable. You can expect it. Peter tells us how to think. He says, **don't think it is strange**. There is nothing unusual about it. It is to be expected.

The real surprise is not **how much** persecution we face. It is **how little** we face.

Peter and Christ were both telling us something that we as believers need to know. We need to know how to think rightly about this. And right thinking is not likely to come naturally.

We are prone to being **aghast** to be treated unfairly. Rejoicing in that environment does not happen naturally. It requires a **special kind** of thinking and that thinking needs to be **trained**.

Every human being is a servant of a spiritual master. We are either the children of Christ or we are the children of the devil. Each side will represent their family tree. The world must act like the world. They are powerless to do otherwise. No, there need be no surprise about this. What is in **them** will come out. What is in **us** will come out. That is the thinking. There is nothing **strange** about this. We should have no **shock** when we see this happen.

Worldly people are going to be **for** that which their father is **for**. They will **vote** that way. They will **choose** that way. They will **speak** that way. They will **be** that way. And where we stand counter to them, depending on the circumstance, they will oppose us. And where it is in their power and they are heated up about it, they will seek our harm.

I like how John MacArthur sums up the hatred we will receive based on the beatitudes process.

John MacArthur

The world cannot handle the righteous life that characterizes kingdom living. It is not understandable and acceptable to them, and they cannot stomach it even in others. Poverty of spirit runs counter to the pride of the unbelieving heart. The repentant, contrite disposition that mourns over sin is never appreciated by the callous, indifferent, unsympathetic world. The meek and quiet spirit that takes wrong and does not strike back is regarded as pusillanimous, and it rasps against the militant,

vengeful spirit characteristic of the world. To long after righteousness is repugnant to those whose fleshly cravings are rebuked by it, as is a merciful spirit to those whose hearts are hard and cruel. Purity of heart is a painful light that exposes hypocrisy and corruption, and peacemaking is a virtue praised by the contentious, self-seeking world in words but not in heart.

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary - Matthew 1-7.

Our friend John explains well why Beatitude living grates on the world so.

And what are we to do when that hatred takes its aim **at us**. Here is the most remarkable thing. There is no call for great moral indignation. There is no call for creating a cause to protect ourselves. No.

In fact, we see by what Christ **does say** what He **does not** mean. We see the options we **do not have** at our disposal.

First, the Christian must not retaliate. We are not to do harm to those who harmed us, even when it is in our power to do so. We will see examples, later on, in this sermon on the mount where we are told **this same thing**. We are told to **show love** to those who are persecuting us.

The **second** thing that is **not an option** is for us to **foster resentment**. That is a very easy thing to allow. But it is simply not an option. We are not to fret because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. It only causes harm. That is not from a psychology book. That is from God's word.

And the **third** thing that is **very likely** for us, but **not an option** for us is that we must never allow our persecution **to depress us or cause us to be despondent**. How easy it is for us to think, it just isn't fair. It is not right that I should do this **good thing** and be treated so badly. It is not right that the **wicked** can **get away** with this injustice. It is easy to add things up wrongly and get bummed out. But that is not faithful thinking. We are not seeing it right. We are not allowing our minds to be shaped by scripture.

Now I just want to say something here before I go on. We must keep the **proper context** before we move on to the reaction that we are **commanded** to have. And I use that word intentionally. It is not a suggestion. It is a **command**.

We must see that persecution, in itself, is **not** a good thing. If it were a good thing it would make its way into heaven. But there will be no persecution in our eternal existence. There will be peace.

No **persecution** is **not good**. It is a profoundly **sad** state that human beings would be so hateful toward their Creator that they will persecute anything

that reminds them of His righteousness. That is horrible. The only thing **good about** persecution is what it portrays about the **one being persecuted**.

OK We looked at what we **should not** do. We looked at those things that our flesh would do by default. But no. Those are not for us. But look what is.

The call is to rejoice. **Rejoice**.

And this word for rejoice is not some **Eeyore** from Winnie the Pooh statement that says

Oh good, the world is treating me bad again.

No the word means to **rejoice greatly**, be **overjoyed**, to **skip and jump** with happy excitement. It is describing a giddy happiness.

Doesn't that seem like the dumbest thing you have ever heard?

We are supposed to intentionally view this thing in a positive light and be giddily happy about it. That is what we are being told. There is no mistake in what it means. Peter words it a little different where he tells us that we should **"glorify God in the matter"**.

He also says **but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy**.

There are two things we must possess in order to respond to persecution properly. These things are not natural. A normal human will not possess these things, nor do they have any reason to do so.

To respond to persecution properly, **First we must desire Christ's current endorsement**. And **second we must cling to HIS future reward**. That is wrapped up in all of the teachings about persecution.

When we get **this right** it begins to make sense.

Let's start with this question:

What are we **placed on this earth for**? Why did Christ bring us to Himself? Why are we breathing? What is our purpose? Is it not to glorify God? Is that not why we are here.

Well when the world **treats us** the way the world **treated Christ** because we are **being like Christ**, we know that we are, at that point, **servicing our role well**. We know that we are glorifying Christ. We look enough like Christ that people are hating us for His sake. The persecutors may be **hating Christ**. But we are **glorifying Christ** by representing Him **well** to the world.

So that is why we **can** and **should be** happy. It makes perfect sense. We can know that, just like the prophets were hated for speaking the truth, so we can be. And by doing so we are **making much** of Christ. We can know we are being **exactly** what we should be. How many times does that happen to us?

Isn't it always good when we know we are making a stand for Christ? Isn't it always good when we receive affirmation for the job we are doing? Isn't it great when we get confirmation that we truly are doing things that God is using? I am so encouraged by you when you tell me how God has used something that I have said. We all know what that is like, I suspect. Isn't it good to get the idea that **Jesus is smiling** on what we are doing and regarding it as a **job well done** for Him. Isn't that a great source of happiness for us? Well that is the thinking that goes behind the rejoicing we do at persecution for Christ sake. It is God saying, **you are doing this right**. You are **representing me accurately**. You are **acting like me**. You are standing out as one of mine. I am proud of you. And if we are a Beatitudes believer, if we have come through the beatitudes process, would this not **be the highlight**? Would we not **live** for Christ's **wholehearted endorsement** of our faithfulness. Well in persecution, **we are receiving that**. That is the reasoning in our text. Persecution for righteousness' sake means we are doing something right.

So we have the **present endorsement**. Then next is the **future reward**.

Jesus said

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And for great is your reward in heaven

A believer cannot fixate on the reward in this life as the motivation for living a faithful life. This will lead to a **spiritual train wreck**. We cannot focus on the here and now for our reward.

It is impossible to greet persecution with rejoicing if we are looking for a **here and now reward**. How in the world could we? The persecution might take us away from our **loved ones**. It might take us from the things **we most enjoy** in this life. It might remove our health. It might rob us of the years of doing the things we want to do. It may rob us of life itself. How could we be happy about that if here and now is where our heart is fixated? It would be impossible. The only way that rejoicing during persecution makes sense is if we are **looking for the reward that is coming with Christ's next return**. It will only happen if we are **storing up for ourselves treasures in heaven**. It will only happen if we truly see this life as a pilgrimage. And that is always what faith does. Isn't that what Hebrews tells us?

Hebrews 11:13-16 (NKJV)

¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

¹⁴ For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a

homeland.

¹⁵ **And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.**

¹⁶ **But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.**

It is very hard for us living in this flesh to not allow the **things in this life** to become **the things we worship**. It is hard for us, especially when our lives are going well, to not **fixate** on the relationships we have. It is hard to **hold them in an open hand**, willing to have God do whatever He wills because we trust Him.

But the Christian walk is a pilgrimage. We live in the world of spouses and friendships and children and grandchildren. But while we try to do this faithfully, we look for the day when everything is perfect and this world no longer exists in its current sinful state. That is Christianity 101. So those things most important in **this life** are those things that point to **the next life**. And persecution is a grand indicator. Persecution for righteousness sake is a **neon sign** that says, you are **one of those forever people**. You are one of those **eternal people**. You are one of those **blessed people**.

And there is something wonderful in our text. **for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

When we are persecuted, we are also standing in the ranks of the prophets. The prophets are the unsung heroes. They are the guys that were held in **highest esteem** by God and those who **loved God**. They were the **spokespeople** for God. Our text tells us that when we are persecuted for being like Christ, we are like the heroes. We are like the prophets who spoke for God no matter what the cost was. How can that **not** be encouraging to us? Do we **not** all want to have the same status as some of the **greatest believers** throughout time? To be like the prophets, to share a similar fate, is such an awesome complement.

Persecution hands us a gift. And while persecution is **not good**, what it provides a believer is **very good**. It affirms **three** things. It affirms **who** we are. It affirms **where** we are going. And it affirms **what we will find** when we get there. That is why we can be so giddy when we are persecuted because we are like Christ.

Our brother Jones says this”

This is one of the ways in which our Lord turns everything into a victory. In a sense He makes even the devil a cause of blessing. The devil through his agencies persecutes the Christian and makes him unhappy. But if you

look at it in the right way, you will find a cause for rejoicing, and will turn to Satan and say, 'Thank you; you are giving me proof that I am a child of God, otherwise I should never be persecuted like this for Christ's sake.' James, in his Epistle, argues likewise that this is proof of your calling and sonship; it is something which makes you know for certain you are a child of God.¹

Again I think it needs said- don't expect this response to come **naturally**. We must **rethink** things. We must trust God to the extent that we let him **tell us how we should feel**. We cannot trust our flesh's reactions. We must rely upon our Lord and take the clue from Him as to how to respond.

Now it might be good at this point to make an application. How often do you think of the **eternal life that God has promised you and thank Him** for it? This is more than just your relationship with Christ now. It is your **eternal bliss in glory**. We cannot live our lives the way they are meant to be lived if our focus is continually on here and now. How much are you focused on **now**, how you **feel** right now? What you **think you need** right now? What you think your current reality **reveals to you** right now? Your perceptions? Your **conclusions** based on what you see right now?

It is eternity that gives us the fuel for godly living, not here and now. Our circumstances might be like Job's. They could be very hard now. But that proves nothing. Faith says that **God will make it worth our while**. God will reward us for our faithfulness. Is it hard now? That is not a shock. That is not something that is a surprise in scripture. Many faithful people lived through very difficult circumstances. But it is our **eternal focus** that helps us keep perspective. Christ will always make it worth our while. That is the reason we can truly be happy when we face persecution. It is not about **life now**. It is about **future reward**. **When we focus on the here and now, we will be as miserable or as happy as our circumstances.** But if we have faith in God's word, we can and will **rejoice** when the world is stripping us of everything that they have the power to strip. I think it would be good to close with this story from John MacArthur about John Chrysostom.

John Chrysostom, a godly leader in the fourth-century church preached so strongly against sin that he offended the unscrupulous Empress Eudoxia as well as many church officials. When summoned before

¹ Lloyd-Jones, D. M. (1976). [*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*](#) (Second edition, p. 147). England: Inter-Varsity Press.

Emperor Arcadius, Chrysostom was threatened with banishment if he did not cease his uncompromising preaching. His response was, "Sire, you cannot banish me, for the world is my Father's house." "Then I will slay you," Arcadius said. "Nay, but you cannot, for my life is hid with Christ in God," came the answer. "Your treasures will be confiscated" was the next threat, to which John replied, "Sire, that cannot be, either. My treasures are in heaven, where none can break through and steal." "Then I will drive you from man, and you will have no friends left!" was the final, desperate warning. "That you cannot do, either," answered John, "for I have a Friend in heaven who has said, I will never leave you or forsake you." Chrysostom was indeed banished, first to Armenia and then farther away to Pityus on the Black Sea, to which he never arrived because he died on the way. But neither his banishment nor his death disproved or diminished his claims. **The things that he valued most highly, not even an emperor could take from him.**

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary - Matthew 1-7.

This is the life we are called to. It will involve persecution if we live it properly. There will be some who hate us only because we live for Christ. That is to be expected. And the darker our world becomes, the more difficult our circumstances are likely to be. But we are called to **rejoice**. To really and truly rejoice. All is not lost. All can never be lost for the Christian. We can rejoice because when we live like Christ, we will be treated like Christ. And when we are treated like Christ, we know our future is assured. We are being stamped with God's seal of approval. we can know that we are in as good a state as exists in our reality. And we are assured that our eternity is going to be absolutely wonderful.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven