

Matthew 5:10-12

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Blessed are those who are persecuted...

Ah what comforting words they are! For wouldn't you like to be comforted with knowing that if anyone objects to your position, and you feel the sting of their tongue or lash, then you must be blessed by God? So many people throughout the centuries have found reassurance that their weird ideas, their aggravating personalities, their political ideals and their abrasive attitudes have been blessed by God... for that is what Jesus said wasn't it? *Blessed are those who are persecuted.*

But that is not what Jesus said. He said *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake...* because they want to live as Jesus lived... because they live in a godly way.

Jesus goes on to explain this a bit more. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Persecution comes in many forms. It is not limited to the terrible torture that has faced Christians in repressive countries. A Christian can face persecution when ridiculed by his or her family for their beliefs, or ostracised by relatives. It can come in whispers behind your back when you refuse to pinch company goods, or when you frown at a dirty joke.

It can even come with a false report about you, the gossip that whizzes about, the sneery put down, and the deliberate half truth that leaves you high & dry.

And for righteousness' sake is explained as: *Because of me.* It is the living for Jesus and our copying of him that brings the persecution that God blesses.

Jesus taught that this would happen in many places, eg John 15:18-20 *If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world it would love you as its own. As it is you do not belong to the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.*

And 2 Timothy 3:12 says *In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

If you are growing in Christ, and becoming more godly, then people will be sparking against you. You will be different from the average sinful person, because you will not want to be living a

selfish life. They will not like that, because it shows up their laxness, so they will begin to persecute you, to make you behave like them.

So what should you do when you feel the pressure coming?

Jesus said in Mathew 5:12 *Rejoice & be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Other parts of the New Testament give other encouragement to persevere. In Acts 5:41, the apostles rejoiced because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name of Jesus. In 1 Peter 1, trials are a means of grace to prove how genuine our faith is, and to purify it.

And the three men in Daniel 3 when persecuted were comforted by God in a direct and personal visit into the fiery furnace.

But in Matthew 5, we are to rejoice because our rewards are great in heaven. We have an eternal aspect to life. This life before death is not all that there is to living.

There is a life after death, and a great reward is waiting.

That does not mean that we should go around looking to be persecuted to get a bigger reward. Rather, whenever persecution comes, rejoice knowing that God will right the wrongs and reward faithfulness.

Every age has had persecution. Sometimes it has come from outside the church, and unfortunately, sometimes it has come from inside the church. Wherever true righteousness is, people react in persecution. But when we experience that, instead of getting depressed or bitter, rejoice in it as a triumphant sign that the kingdom of God is ours.