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Text: Mat 5:10-12  
Title: “Persecuted for the Cause of Justice”  
The Big Idea: God’s rewards will survive your trials.

“Persecuted for the Cause of Justice”

I am very excited this morning for a specific reason. In five days, this Friday, I am going to fly to Honduras with my wife and daughters to visit my Honduran family. My dad comes from La Ceiba, Honduras, and I still have uncles and aunts, cousins, who live in different parts of this beautiful country. During the last two years, I was unable to visit my Honduran family because we had a pandemic, many problems with international flights, and various restrictions.

When I visit my family there, I go to see a cousin, she is older than me. The same thing happens every trip. I can predict that she is going to insult me or my family in some way. Most of the time, she doesn’t want to hurt me. For example, once I returned to Honduras, and she told me: “You are too fat, cousin. You need to lose some weight.” On another occasion, “Cousin, your stomach is too big. You have to do more sit-ups.” On another occasion, “Cousin, the United States is a demonic country.” Again, “Cousin, this cake is very dry.” “Cousin...cousin...cousin.”

Maybe it’s weird, but I’m used to this behavior. In the past, it bothered me, but now, it doesn’t bother me. Sure, there are many situations that require a different response. I do *not* want to say that we should respond this way in every situation. Instead, I want to say that this perspective can help us with things that come into our lives that don’t have to hurt us. It can help us in our daily lives, but especially, it can help us in our faith. If you are a Christian this morning, you should anticipate that various insults and problems are going to come your way. Jesus tells us this in Matthew 5:10-12, in the Sermon on the Mount, at the end of the Beatitudes. Read Matthew 5:10-12.

Our Lord Jesus wants to teach us several lessons in this section of the Sermon on the Mount. This morning I want to emphasize three lessons in particular.

### ***Lesson 1: Plan to be Persecuted***

The word “pursue” occurs three times (10, 11, 12). Notice again at 5:44. In classical Greek, the word means, “to hunt an animal like a predator.” *What is the reason?* It is “for my sake” (11), for the sake of justice (12). It is the cost when we live as disciples, when we proclaim that Jesus is Lord, when we pursue justice.

There is a *clear point*. We must anticipate suffering and persecution when we follow Jesus on the path of discipleship. Commentator D. A. Carson writes:

*“Opposition is a normal mark of being a disciple of Jesus, as normal as hungering for justice or being merciful.”* (p.165)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. Carson, *Matthew-Mark* (Expositor’s Bible), vol 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 165.

*On one hand*, it should not surprise us that we experience persecution for our faith. Notice that the apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 4:12: “*Dear brothers, do not be surprised at the fire of the test you are enduring, as if it were something unusual.*”

*On the other hand*, we should not look for suffering. God has not called us to love suffering; he has called us to love the Lord Jesus.

*Christians experience persecution.* There are many places in the world where Christians experience terrible suffering. Here are some statistics about the persecution of Christians in the world.

A report from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity says that Christians are the most persecuted religious group in the world today. Approximately 90,000 Christians were martyred in the past year, 246 people every day, 1 person every 3 minutes. According to a book by John Allen, between 1-2 million Christians experienced some form of persecution in the past year. There are several types. There is social discrimination, institutional discrimination, employment discrimination, legal discrimination, suppression of missionary activities, suppression of conversion to Christianity, suppression of cult worship, forced conversion to another religion, violence against an individual, and violence against a community of Christians.<sup>2</sup>

We do not pay the same cost for them. However, there is still a cost for all Christians. Maybe a relationship with Christ costs you a friendship because you decide you won't do the things your friends do; maybe it costs you your job because your boss wants you to engage in unethical or illegal activities and you decide you can't; maybe it costs you family relationships, maybe a relationship with your brother or sister, with your father or mother. They believe that you are abandoning the believers in your family. Yes, of course, there is a relational cost for every Christian who follows Jesus.

So, plan to be persecuted. There is great persecution in other parts of the world, usually worse; however, there are persecutions that every Christian experiences.

## **Lesson 2: Let Insults Slide Off**

*Insults and difficulties* invariably come to the disciples of Christ. Notice that the person is the second person plural (not 3rd)—Blessed are you in 10. You in 11.

*There are two words/phrases we can focus on.* 1) Insults—11—the word means: “reproach without justification.” 2) slander—12—occurs against you, the phrase literally is, “speak all evil” against you—lies, gossip, slander.

Yes, we are going to experience insults, lies, and slander because we live in a fallen world. People lie. But, also, there is a type of insult or slander that comes in the life of a Christian.

When you save your body for the person you want to marry, the world might insult you. The world does not recognize a Christian sexual ethic. When you decide to save your money or give your money to the church instead of spending your money on expensive things that give you status, the world might insult you. The world does not understand a different way. When you defend the traditional family or the rights of the unborn or the dignity of immigrants, the world might insult you. Many times, the world does not respect the traditional family, the rights of the unborn, the dignity of immigrants. Wait for this! Jesus tells us in John 15:18, 20:

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<sup>2</sup> John Allen, *The Global War on Christians* (New York: Crown, 2016), 31-32.

*18 If the world hates you, remember that before it hated me... 20 If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they have obeyed my teachings, they will also obey yours."*

How can we respond? Let the insults slide off you. There is an expression in English: "This is like water off a duck's back." What happens to the water that touches the duck's back? The water slides off. It can be the same with the insults we experience. We can say: Slide off me insults. Slide off me lies. Slide off me slander.

I love this verse because there is a promise about the impact of insults in the lives of believers:

Proverbs 26:2: "Like the aimless sparrow or the nestless swallow, the curse for no reason never reaches its destination."

God gives us strength and power from him. Remember, the apostle Paul says this to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:7:

"For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power, love and self-control."

You have the Holy Spirit, the same spirit that raised Jesus from the grave is working in your life, in your heart, in your soul.

When I think of the topic of strength, I think of the year we moved to New Jersey in 2009. New Jersey is a tough place. People speak directly and frankly; some people say that they speak vulgarly and rudely. My wife is a very nice person, so she needed to adjust to many things: driving, customer service, or the lack of customer service, and the stress and pressure that people show in almost every situation. As a gift, one of her friends bought a t-shirt for her, and the slogan on the t-shirt read: "New Jersey: Only the strong survive." When she was driving, she needed to remember, "I live in New Jersey. Only the strong survive." When she was talking to rude people on the phone, she needed to remember, "I live in New Jersey. Only the strong survive."

This is our anthem as Christians. We can be strong. God can protect us. God can give us strength. God can strengthen us in our fight

How can you answer? This is Lesson 2: Let the insults slide off you. Shake them off. Slide them off.

### **Lesson 3: Remember your Reward in Times of Struggle—10, 11, 12**

God has given us sure promises. First, notice the language in 12:

"Rejoice and be overjoyed because a great reward awaits you."

Second, notice what the promises are in the passage. 10, 11—Notice the word blessed. What does this word mean? In the Bible, it means: "The presence and power of God are yours in ever-increasing supply." Also, look at 10—because the kingdom of heaven belongs to you. Now, at this moment, they have the presence, the security, the protection of the kingdom of heaven. Finally, note 12—you are not alone—The prophets

experienced hardship, persecution. They persevered. You can persevere, too. The main theme of these verses is this: *we will receive a great inheritance*.

A while ago, I read an article by a journalist named Brian Lowery. He wrote an article about two Hungarian brothers who were living in their country in Hungary. Penniless and homeless, brothers Zsolt and Geza Peladi had lived in a cave outside the city of Budapest for some years. Sometimes they would come out of their cave to sell metal or candy to pay for food or supplies. They experienced many difficulties, trials, afflictions, much adversity. It seemed that their situation was hopeless.

But their entire world changed in one day in 2009. Something incredible happened in their lives. One day, a group of charity workers told them that they had inherited a substantial part of their deceased grandmother's fortune. Before she died, she lived in Germany and had \$6.6 billion dollars. They didn't know their grandmother. Their mother had died, and she left them when they were young. But in an instant, they discovered something so important: when they received her inheritance from her, they changed their perspective on their present and their future.<sup>3</sup>

We have a great heritage waiting for us. If you could say the message of Matthew 5:10-12 in one sentence, it is this: *God's rewards will outlast your trials*.

Yes, you will experience persecution, suffering, insults, and slander. It was the same for the prophets. In these moments, you can remember: *They were blessed*. You are anticipating the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven. *God's rewards will outlast your trials*. Let us remember our reward now and in the future, today and always.

### **Conclusion**

Brothers and sisters, the Lord Jesus knows us. He knows that you have difficulties, that you are discouraged at times, but the Lord Himself has prepared a place for you, now and in the future. He knows that we need to know: The rewards... Especially in the moments when you feel like living in a cave, God can give you his light, his life, his strength, and his power. Even in the cave, we can remember the promises that Jesus Christ gives us in Matthew 5: God's rewards will outlast our trials. Someday soon, in your Christian life, prayer will turn to praise, faith will turn to sight, and the cave will turn into a castle. *Bless the name of the Lord!*

*NOTE: English translation prepared by Editor Eric Black.*

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<sup>3</sup> Mike Krumboltz, "From Cave to Castle," [www.buzz.yahoo.com](http://www.buzz.yahoo.com) (12-3-09).