

**Bro. Ray Kennedy**  
**BLESSED ARE THE PERSECUTED**  
**Matthew 5:10-12**

**Introduction:**

A. I don't know about you, but the one thing I really like about all of God's Word is God's honesty. The more I learn about God the more practical I realize He is. We serve a God that doesn't expect us to just take a leap of faith and hope he will save us. No, He pours out His heart to us in 66 love letters, and says here is who I am, here is what I have done, and here is what I promise to do. Then through an examination of the evidence he asks us to trust in Him. God is very upfront with us about His desire for us to become His children, and how He wants our thoughts, attitudes, and actions to mirror His – but He also wants us to know just exactly what we're getting into when we decide to take a stand for Jesus Christ.

- God tells us about both the blessings and the blastings that will be in store for us if we follow His way.
- He tells us about both the gifts and the demands of His kind of lifestyle.
- He tells us about both the rewards and the responsibilities of being His children.
- He tells us about the sweet and the bitter side of life in Christ.

God wants us to become Christ followers with our eyes wide open to all the possible consequences. He fully intends for us to count the cost of discipleship as well as the dividends. And when we do this we develop a faith of substance, a know so faith, not a hope so belief system. It is this type of faith that can stand, and follow through in the face of adversity.

In our text today we are going to be looking at the opposite side of the coin. Please turn in you Bibles to Matthew Chapter 5. We will be looking at verses 10-12.

We will be looking at a passage we know as one of the Beatitudes. And in this passage we can see the blessings that come to those that persevere in the face of pressure. In fact, as you study the Beatitudes you that the blessing only comes to those who are willing to pay the price. And this last Beatitude that we'll look at today is no exception:

**Mat 5:10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**Mat 5:11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.**

**Mat 5:12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.**

Contrary to popular opinion, when we choose to publicly live for Christ, the world will rarely blow us kisses. Jesus makes it very clear that blessing will come to us within a framework of persecution. He declared that we can expect persecution, rather than

praise, cruel insults rather than cordial invitations, reviling rather than respect, harassment rather than honor, abuse rather than applause, complaints rather than compliments, and slander rather than support.

And in all this He promises that His blessing will be evident in our lives.

Now there is a question behind all of this that I want to try to answer for you this morning: The question is, “How do I handle the harassment that Jesus promised to those who will commit themselves to Him?”

Let’s look at three answers:

## **1. EXPECT IT**

- I want to discuss with you three norms for those who are Christ followers concerning this matter of harassment for our faith.

- A norm is a standard or model that we can rely upon to be true – these are proven principles that we can rely on to be true.

### **NORM #1: Persecution Comes in Various Forms**

We generally hear the word “persecution” and automatically think of those who are literally giving their lives for their faith.

- There have been more martyrs for the faith in the last 100 years than in the previous 1,900 years of Christianity combined – persecution is alive and well. Of course, most of us in the U.S.A. do not experience this level of persecution. We have been blessed and have not had to resist unto blood...yet.

But let’s look back at Matthew 5:11 and see that there were various forms of harassment.

**Mat 5:11 Blessed are ye, when *men shall revile (insult) you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.***

Most of us experience harassment on this level of being insulted and spoken falsely against. We see this as a normal course of life in our secular universities, in our political debates, and in the various forms of media available to us.

While it’s not fair and we don’t like it, it is a norm of the Christian life.

### **NORM #2: If You Live Like Christ You’ll Be Treated Like Christ**

Unless you live in a magnet colony, I think it would be fair to say that any time two opposites live in the same vicinity conflict will emerge.

- Put a cat in the cage with a bird and watch the feathers fly.
- Put a cat in a dog pen and watch the fur fly.
- Put a dog and a skunk in a box together and -- well, you know what would happen.

When you put people who have opposite value systems, opposite priorities, opposite lifestyles, and opposite goals in the same area, there will undoubtedly be conflict. One group will actually try to eliminate the presence or at least the influence of the other group. If you are living the life of righteousness that Jesus has called us to you will suffer for it.

**Mat 5:10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**Mat 5:11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.**

**Mat 24:9 Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.**

**2Ti 3:12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.**

Notice that this harassment is a result of living like Christ. If you're fired from your job because you're lazy, or are late all the time, don't chalk it up to being persecuted for Christ. This type of persecution comes specifically because you are living a godly lifestyle.

The Christian is different from those in the world – your values, goals, priorities, and so on, are different. Because of that difference you will receive some level of harassment.

When Christians lose their uniqueness, when they become so absorbed in the antichrist system that an observer cannot tell the difference between them and non-Christians, the persecution will cease.

### **NORM #3: It is a part of the Spiritual Battle we Face as Believers**

**Eph 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.**

**Act 14:19 And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.**

**Act 14:20 Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.**

**Act 14:21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch,**

**Act 14:22** Confirming the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

Paul had just been stoned to death, or nearly to death for his faith and he returns to Lystra, Iconium, and to Antioch with a three prong message strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in their faith, and letting them know that through much tribulation we enter into the kingdom of God.

Paul was letting them know that if they stand for the kingdom they will be attacked for that stance – the same is true for us.

Let's consider our question again: "How do I handle the harassment that Jesus promised to those who will commit themselves to Him?"

## **2. REDIRECT IT**

- What we need to do is reframe the situation we are in – redefine the paradigm.
- Begin to understand that the fact that we are being harassed, in the eyes of eternity, is a positive, a plus, a good thing.

### **± Remember the Source**

**Eph 6:12** For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*.

The enemy is who? The enemy is the devil, right?

Now when somebody comes up and harasses me at school or at work or on the street, I have to remember, they're not the enemy, they're just a pawn. They're just people like you and me, but they have been deceived by Satan. And they're just tools in the hands of the devil, he's the enemy. Listen, the devil cannot get at God, so he does what in his mind is the next best thing, he attacks His (God's) children.

### **± Refuse to Retaliate**

**Rom 12:17** Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

**Rom 12:18** If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

**Rom 12:19** Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

**Rom 12:20** Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

**Rom 12:21** Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Once a husband and wife were having a fight at the breakfast table. The fight wasn't over but they had to get ready to leave for work. The wife was having trouble with the zipper on her dress and asked her husband to help. In a huff, the husband freed the zipper and then angrily ran it up and down rapidly several times and then left.

That afternoon, when the wife returned home from work, there was a car in the driveway with a man lying on his back underneath the car, with his legs sticking out.

Remembering the breakfast incident, she went over, grasped the zipper on his fly, and zipped it down and up several times and then stomped into the house. There, to her surprise, sat her husband drinking coffee.

In great embarrassment she explained to her husband what she had done. He rushed outside to find his neighbor out cold underneath the car. When the wife had grasped his zipper he reflexively tried to sit up and knocked himself out.

In all seriousness, when we try to seek revenge for harassment, we and the kingdom of God, end up the losers.

### **± Replace Evil with Good**

**Mat 5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;**

This is getting hard isn't it? I told you that God is completely honest with us. He doesn't hold back when telling us how difficult it can be to be a Christian.

But there is a reason behind all of this – both we and those harassing us will be blessed by our love and prayers.

**1Co 4:12 ....being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it:**

**1Co 4:13 Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.**

The Bible is saying here:

- *When we are cursed, we bless;*
- *when we are persecuted, we endure it;*
- *when we are slandered, we answer kindly.*

And it goes on to say that we will be treated like the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world. Now if that isn't bad enough, our text this morning says.... And this is the really hard part...

### **± Rejoice In It And Be Exceeding Glad**

**Mat 5:12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.**

“Rejoice and be glad...” **Why?**

### **1) Because it Testifies to Christ's Presence in our lives**

Now I told you, you're going to have to make a paradigm shift here – you're going to have to start seeing things through God's eyes if this is going to make any sense to you.

**(Acts 5:41 ) The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Wow! These guys understood that their suffering was actually a validation of their commitment to Jesus Christ.**

**1Pe 4:14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy *are ye*; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.**

We should be happy because the spirit of God rests upon us and more importantly we glorify God when we endure harassment for Christ. When we are harassed for our faith it is evidence that we're truly living for Christ

### **2) Because we are in Good Company**

**Mat 5:12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.**

**Heb 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,**

Knowing that the saints that have gone before us suffered for their faith, and kept that faith, should be a great encouragement to us. This is something do-able, it is something worth doing, and the reward is fantastic.

The final reason we should rejoice in harassment is:

### **3) Because It's Only Temporary**

It is possible to endure much suffering, when we know that there is going to be an end to it at some time in the future.

**2Co 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory;**

In the scope of eternity, what we endure now is nothing.

There is a third answer to how to handle harassment:

### **3. TAKE COMFORT IN IT**

- There are three very basic and quite extraordinary reasons we can take comfort in harassment.

#### **± In Suffering We Identify with Christ**

**Joh 15:20 Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.**

We want to be like Christ, to live like Him, to possess His wisdom, His compassion, His love. But there is another sense in which we are drawn to identify with Christ in His suffering. Not in the sense that we ask for persecution, or that we desire it. But in the sense that when it comes I can more readily relate to who Christ is and what He has done for me.

#### **± In Suffering We Inherit the Kingdom of Heaven**

The Beatitudes begin and end with the same blessing – the inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven .

**Mat 5:10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Now don't get me wrong here. I'm not saying you have to suffer to get to heaven. Even though it is promised, it is not one of the qualifying conditions to get you there.

What I am saying is this. In heaven we will gather around the throne of God with all who have suffered because of their faith -- and there we will take comfort in knowing that our brothers and sisters down through the ages have been willing, along with us, to not only worship the suffering Servant, but to suffer with Him. Full unity will be realized, not just because we have a common faith, but because we have had a common experience.

#### **± In Suffering We Look Forward to a Great Reward**

**Mat 5:12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven**

I don't claim to fully have God's reward system figured out. And I know that being in the presence of God alone is reward enough. But for those who have been persecuted and stood firm, there is a great reward waiting. And though we do not stand firm to earn

anything, it is still a comfort for us to know that God knows what we are going through, and He's keeping tabs.

## Conclusion:

I want to ask you a couple of tough questions as we close, and believe me when I say, I'm also asking these questions of myself.

Here's the first question:

- **What is your faith costing you?**  
That's a pretty hard question to answer. We've got it so easy in America, and we thank God for that blessing, but we pay a price for it. Perhaps apathy and complacency are the worst of all sins.
- The second question I would ask, **at what cost would you stay faithful to Christ?**  
**At what cost would you be faithful?**

You know persecution is really out of our vocabulary. I heard one preacher get up and say to people, "I thank you for braving the rain to be here today." I tell you our folks on our cloud of witnesses like David and Samson are going, "Braving the RAIN?" "Braving the RAIN? Leaving your warm house and walking 20 feet with an umbrella and coming into an air-conditioned/heated auditorium? Braving the RAIN?"

You don't brave rain, it's just a minor inconvenience. I really think we all need to kind of re-grip who we're called to be, and the commitment we're called to have.

You will be blessed if your heart is singular and pure and devoted. And nobody can take that away from you, even people who would harass you for your faith.