

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 looked at the peacemakers. We have gotten to the place where we are willing to **die to our selfish interests** and to **live for the glory of Christ**. We are representing Christ in our relationships with others, trying to be a force to reconcile **man to God** and **man to man** in Christ's stead. The good of others has become more important to us than our own self protection of self gratification.

Now, what would you expect to happen to a bunch of peacemakers? These people are the best. They love others far more than anyone else.

Would we not expect these people to be **honored** and **respected** in this life?

Would we not expect them to be **loved** and **revered**?

Well, who was the greatest peacemaker ever?

It was clearly Christ Himself.

And how was He treated?

He was hated and killed.

Why?

Because the fleshly person loves darkness and not light. Peacemakers expose sin. Flesh hates that. No one, by the fleshly nature they were born with, wants to have their sin exposed. It takes a miracle for that to have a good effect on a person.

It is very clear that this kind of peacemaker is not what the **United Nations** has in mind. It is not what **corporations** want. These are not politically popular people. These peacemakers cannot be **negotiated** with. They will not **tone down** their message. They will not **skirt the bad news** about the human condition. They will not **appease** situations that should be **escalated** for the good of those involved.

And what do they **inspire** with the flesh loving public? **Hatred**.

So when the lovers of this world begin to quote Jesus about peacemaking, they have no idea what they are talking about. Because, clearly, anyone who is doing peacemaking **the way Jesus wants it done** will be hated by this world, unless God is actively at work in their hearts.

Now let's look at the **response of the world** to peacemakers.

This brings us to our text.

Before we begin, I would like to pose a question.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer lived during the rise of Nazi Germany. He formed an alliance of churches called the Confessing Church. These were churches who refused to conform to the pressures placed on them by the current government. Mr. Bonhoeffer was a courageous and principled man. He wrote several excellent books. **The Cost of Discipleship** and **Life Together** were two of them. Mr. Bonhoeffer also involved himself in a plot to kill Adolph Hitler. He was arrested, convicted of his crime, and hanged on April 9, 1945. This is my question. **Was Mr. Bonhoeffer persecuted for righteousness sake?**

My aim is that we can all clearly answer this question when I am done this morning.

OK let's read our text again this morning.

Matthew 5:10-12 (NKJV)

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

I believe this is the main statement that the next two verses expand upon. The next verse gives **examples** of how this persecution may happen.

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

And the next verse explains the **ramifications** of this blessing, what we should **do** when we find ourselves in this blessed state.

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

Now we need to remind ourselves that this is describing a people who are **to be congratulated** for the **happy state** they find themselves in. These are the **happy people** of a **happy God**.

We do well when we talk to people about their souls to convey to them that what Christ offers **leads to** true and eternal **happiness**. That is what **everyone** wants. God made us this way. The desire for happiness is not a bad thing. It is a **good thing** that when **directed by the Holy Spirit** will lead us to **God**.

The bad thing is that we all are born believing that **we know** what will make us happy. Every toddler displays that truth. When they throw a fit to get their way, they are saying, "**give me what I want because what I want will make me happy.**" But we know it does not work. They do not know what will make them happy. And we, apart from God's word, don't know what will make us happy.

When we talk to people about their souls, we do well to ask them “**How is your pursuit of happiness working out for you?** How **satisfied** is your soul? Do you have **peace**? Do you have a joy that lasts through whatever happens to you?

We are truly offering them the state that they **long for** but **do not have**. And they will never have it by pursuing happiness. They will only find it in Christ himself. They will only find **peace** and **happiness** by pursuing **righteousness**.

So we are the **pro**-happiness people. That fact simply cannot be avoided in scripture. It is everywhere once we start looking for it.

Now we have talked about peacemaking and how **godly peacemaking** leads to **persecution**. Now what is this persecution? What does it look like?

I tend to think of persecution as getting burned at the stake. Or having all my goods confiscated. Or being prevented to have a job because I am a Christian. But this scripture lets us know that **even if something does not profoundly do us harm**, that does **not** mean it is **not** persecution. Now I do not, in any way, want to undermine the respect and concern we should have for those facing **severe** persecution and even **martyrdom**. Our persecution up until now has been, for the most part, light. But what I am trying to show here is that even when the world **voices its disapproval of us** because of **righteous acts or truthful doctrine**, it is still **persecution**.

Look at the words used here.

Persecution, Reviling, Saying evil falsely,

Persecution- To follow after to do harm. This word describes when a person is singled out for harm. They are singled out and pursued. And the aim of the pursuit is to harm them. This perfectly describes what Paul was doing to Christians. It describes how Christians are often treated in Muslim environments. It is not hard to understand this concept of persecution. But the harm is not always **bodily harm**. It is not always **monetary harm**. Look at these other words.

Reviling- To rail at, to taunt, to chide.

I read an article recently in a liberal media outlet. It was amazing to see Mike Pence be derided by the media for the stance he took regarding **having private meals** with women **other than his wife**. He simply would not do it. How honorable. What an example of truly honoring his wife and marriage. He was taking no chances with the most important human relationship in his life. It was remarkable. You would think women everywhere would cheer this kind of virtue. But no. Surely many did. But in the liberal press He was reviled. He

was chided. Why? Because of **light**. He stood for the **right** and he did not care what anyone thought of it.

I use this example just to show that, while this probably had little effect on Mr. Pence's life, it was still **intended** to belittle him and the **virtues** he displayed that were part of his **faithful obedience to Christ**. He was made fun of for Christ's sake. And that is much of the kind of persecution we face in the US. Do people make fun of you for **Christ's sake**? Does your obedience to Christ or your explanation of the Gospel evoke **chiding** or **mockery**? That is persecution as described by Christ. If so, greatly rejoice.

Now the next phrase that describes how persecution may happen.

Saying evil falsely- I don't think this takes much explanation.

We can see easily that **what will happen** is Christ followers will become **targets** for the hatred of the lovers of this world. The world will hate them enough to **chase after them**, to **say evil about them**.

We do not need to be surprised when the world says evil falsely about Christians.

Now we need to emphasize the word "**falsely**". When the world exposes the sin and hypocrisy of believers, that is not persecution. If the world is saying, look at this person. This person says one thing but they do another thing, that is not persecution the way Jesus describes it here. If people single us out to **tell the truth about our failings**, we have **invited** that scrutiny by claiming the name of Jesus. We will be held to a **higher standard** and we **should** be. That is **not** persecution.

But when people say things about **why we do faithful things**, and those statements are **not true**, that is persecution.

I have been surprised by hatred and slander a few times in my life. Sometimes they have been inside the church. Sometimes outside. But my most vivid memory was a girl at Southern High School who approached me while I was talking to other students. She began to tell me all kinds of things about myself that were **not at all true**. They described motives that I did not even **begin** to have. She accused me of all kinds of hatred and wickedness. And they were all false. I made the mistake of approaching her **later** to reach out to her and to let her know that I was none of the things that she accused me of. But because I approached her, and my approach was not initiated by her, she got me kicked out of Southern.

That was persecution.

But she had no power over my life, so the persecution had very little effect on the circumstances of my life. I did not like going into the high schools to talk

to kids in that environment anyway, so now I no longer had to do so. Her persecution **accomplished** little harm, but it **intended** harm.

I hope to have a discussion in Sunday School next week to answer the question, **when have you been persecuted?**

Have you ever been hated for following Christ? If you have, then this passage is for you.

Now as we try to make sense of what is **really persecution** and what **is not**, we need to be very careful to include these two phrases.

For righteousness sake

For my sake

What does this mean, **“For righteousness sake”**?

We have already talked about this righteousness that we hunger and thirst for. It is the state of **right** being.

Now what fits under that category?

Righteousness is, first of all, that state that we enter when we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. We become in a right state with God. All of our sin is covered. When we are justified, we become in a **right** state.

But simply being in that state will not bring about persecution. The world would have no way of knowing that spiritual state. How do we let the world know that we are in that state?

2 ways.

What we say. And what we do.

This righteous state leads to **righteous living**. And that righteous living will be different than the world around us.

First it will be different in what we say. Believers are going to be looking for opportunities to tell people how to be right with God. They will want to serve as peacemakers. And for some they speak to, these hearers will **love this message** and **surrender** their lives to King Jesus. But for others, they will **hate that light** being shined in their faces. They will hate the bad news. They will want to run from it or attack it.

Righteousness will also result in speech that is wholesome. It will not join in with the world's **basest motives and instincts**. It will seek to speak the truth even in the dark corners of humankind. It will bring the light of scriptural concepts and words into all kinds of situations. And those **words**, those **statements of light**, will be noticed. They may draw some. But they will also repel some. People will hate it because it makes them look bad. And somehow they want that to be the Christian's fault.

And then there are the **righteous actions**. These are the actions that obey what God says because we love the God who commands it. We will not have sex outside of marriage. We will not live our lives in the pursuit of money. We will not allow pleasure to be the highest priority of our lives. We will not take advantage of people when it is in our power to do so. We will do things to meet the needs of those who hate us. We will use our imaginations to consider what it would be like to be in another person's shoes and then we will do those things that we would want done to us. We will see ourselves as we truly are. We will be humble because humility is simply the purest of honesties.

Do you see what I mean. This **right living** is living according to the **rule and reign of Christ**. It is obedient living, doing only that which is right as directed by God's word.

Naturally, we are not left without an example. Christ was the perfectly righteous example. He **spoke** right things. He **did** right things. And his was the **purest** of persecutions. He was persecuted for only one thing-**righteousness' sake. For His Father's sake.**

OK, now we need to contrast this. Isn't that normally what must be done to really understand something.

What does **not** qualify?

What is **not** for righteousness sake?

What is **not** for Christ's sake?

I posed a question earlier. Was Dietrick Bonhoeffer persecuted for righteousness sake when he was hanged?

Now I am not at all trying to say that he was **never** persecuted for righteousness sake. I believe he was a better man than I will ever be. But I am using his example for clarity's sake.

Dietrick Bonhoeffer was **killed** because he determined that God wanted Him to do something that scripture **does not instruct us to do**. He believed that to kill Hitler would be a loving thing to the rest of the world, although scripture never instructs us to do such a thing. There is no **ministry of murder** in New Testament scripture. Mr. Bonhoeffer **picked up** an instrument of death and, because of it, he **died** by an **instrument of death**, much like Christ said that if we **live** by the sword we will **die** by the sword. He chose a **worldly means** to accomplish what he thought was God's will and he invited a **worldly response** to it.

The point I am trying to make is that sometimes we confuse taking up a **cause** for **righteous living**. And they are often **two different things**.

You and I can pick up a thousand different causes. And when we take up a cause there will always be someone who **hates our cause**. We can try to accomplish a thousand different worldly goals. I am not even trying to say that is a **bad thing**. There may be lots of things worth giving our lives up for. It may well be an honorable thing for us to give up our lives defending the freedom of others. I am not at all trying to say that all causes other than righteousness are **wrong**.

But what I am trying to say is that when we **take up a cause** that is not **righteousness**, the kind of righteous living and speaking that Christ died for, the kind that does not require a worldly strategy or worldly cooperation, we are not experiencing the **kind of persecution** these verses are talking about. Let's use another example. We are given the right by our constitution, which is the highest governing authority in our country, to bear arms. Now at some point, the people claiming to represent that government may come to take our weapons. Some would argue that we have an obligation to our civil government to **resist** that corrupt government. Some would argue that we have an obligation to **submit** to those people who claim to represent our government. Some would say that this is not the Christian's war. I am not trying to sort that out this morning. All I am trying to say is that no matter **what we choose** on that issue, it is not persecution for righteousness sake. That is persecution for a **cause** other than Christ. Is it worth dying for? Maybe. Maybe not. But it does not hold the same blessing, nor the same promise, as those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.

Do you see what I mean?

Right now I could get on Facebook and state lots of my political opinions. And I would be instantly hated by a large mass of people. And there may be a time and a place to do that. But I need to think clearly. That is **not** persecution for righteousness sake.

We have got to have it clear in our minds that being hated because of a **cause** we take on is not the same as being **persecuted for Christ's sake**. We need to ask why it is that we are hated, if such a thing happens to us.

It is easy to spiritualize stances to make our government more godly, but that is not persecution for the sake of Christ. Christ didn't do such a thing and **He could have** accomplished it. Christ would not have brought together a **moral majority** to sway our countries policies and power structures. And while Christ's life surely has differences with our lives, we must always keep His words and His example as our guiding truth.

OK, we also have to keep in mind something else. Being hated because we have no **empathy** or **compassion** for the people that we are speaking to is also not being persecuted for **Christ's sake**.

Some people have personalities that are abrasive. And sometimes we can speak more due to the fact that we have **an agenda to speak** than that we are driven by love to meet another's need. People will tend to know the difference, even if we don't. Some people are just difficult and no one would want to be around them. Blaming the reception they receive on the message they are proclaiming is somewhat a slight of hand. We need to ask about our own actions, would I want to be treated the way I am treating this other person? I think of a bad example I have seen where a church sends its parishioners to protest at funerals with statements of condemnation. The hatred they receive is the same hatred **someone else would receive** if they were to lobby against the **waste of wood** in the typical casket. It has little to do with righteousness. It has more to do with common respect.

We must grow in discernment to understand the difference between what is **naturally** offensive and what is **spiritually** offensive, what is offensive because it is **inconsiderate to others** and what is offensive because it **smacks of a God** that people want nothing to do with.

The thing that should bring on persecution from the world to the church is our **differentness**. It is not that we are more noble than them. We aren't. It isn't that we are smarter than them. We aren't. We certainly do not hold a greater status in this world than they do. No. What we are is **other worldly**. While this world is **their** home, while this world is **all they have to live for**, we have our eyes fixed on something else. We are not trying to get away with anything. We are living in the full view of God all the time. And we want to **please Him**. And we don't care what the rest of the world thinks about it. That is dreadfully hard for the world to bear. It makes them feel out of place. It is, well, a light shining that makes them see things they do not want to see. I will close with 2 Brother Jones quotes. He says this:

This Beatitude tests our ideas as to what the Christian is. The Christian is like his Lord, and this is what our Lord said about him. 'Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets' (Lk. 6:26). And yet is not our idea of what we call the perfect Christian nearly always that he is a nice, popular man who never offends anybody, and is so easy to get on with? But if this Beatitude is true, that is not the real Christian, because the real Christian is a man who is not praised by everybody. They did not praise our Lord, and they will never praise the man who is like Him. 'Woe unto you, when all men shall speak

well of you!' That is what they did to the false prophets; they did not do that to Christ Himself.

And one more

Finally, let us ask ourselves this question: Do we know what it is to be persecuted for righteousness' sake? To become like Him we have to become light; light always exposes darkness, and the darkness therefore always hates the light. We are not to be offensive; we are not to be foolish; we are not to be unwise; we are not even to parade the Christian faith. We are not to do anything that calls for persecution. But by just being like Christ, persecution becomes inevitable. But that is the glorious thing. Rejoice in this, say Peter and James. And our Lord Himself says, 'Blessed are ye, happy are ye, if you are like that.' Because if ever you find yourself persecuted for Christ and for righteousness' sake, you have, in a sense, got the final proof of the fact that you are a Christian, that you are a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. 'Unto you,' says Paul to the Philippians, 'unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake' (Phil. 1:29). And I look at those first Christians persecuted by the authorities and I hear them thanking God that, at last, they had been accounted worthy to suffer for the Name's sake.

May God through His Holy Spirit give us great wisdom, discrimination, knowledge and understanding in these things, so that if ever we are called upon to suffer, we may know for certain that it is for righteousness' sake, and may have the full comfort and consolation of this glorious Beatitude.