



Blessed are the Persecuted

Matthew 5: 10-12

The 8th Beatitude

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Matthew 5:10-12

I. Accused Falsely

“Anyone can accept a reward graciously and many people can take their punishment patiently when they have done wrong. But how many are equipped to handle mistreatment after they’ve done right?” - Charles Swindoll

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy” - Martin Luther King

How do we respond to being falsely accused or blamed? “That’s not fair!” “That’s unjust!”

How *should* we respond *correctly* to being falsely accused or blamed?

- A. Make sure you really are blameless. If you suffer, it must not be as one who is guilty. (1 Peter 4:15) “How is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong?” (1 Peter 2:20) “Live in harmony with one another... Who is going to harm you if you do good?” (1 Peter 3:8,13) Check yourself and listen to the other person. Is it possible you’re accused falsely because of how you presented yourself? Is it possible you are guilty in part?
- B. Stay Calm
 1. Ask God for help in self-control. (Gal 5:23)
 2. Let your integrity defend you. (Prov 10:9, 11:3) “The man of integrity walks securely.”
 3. Stay Quiet. (Prov 10:19, 17:28) “Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent.”
 4. Know God is for you. (Prov 17:15) “Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent – Yahweh detests them both.”
- C. Remember Yeshua
 1. Yeshua remained silent before His accusers.
 2. 1 Peter 2:19-25
 3. Count these various trials as joy because they produce perseverance. (James 1:2-3)

II. Persecuted because of Yeshua

- A. Few of us have experienced persecution other than petty insults and rude comments. But don’t so quickly disqualify yourself. Neither had Yeshua’s listeners experienced significant persecution - yet. The early Christians to whom Peter writes so much about persecution were only experiencing light persecution at the point of his writing 1 Peter. Before Nero, they experienced mainly what we do: annoying insults, sideways glances, rude comments, stereotyping and being excluded from social activities.
- B. Practice responding well to these small incidents so you’ll be better prepared for any real persecution that comes your way. If you can run with the footmen, you’ll be better at keeping up with the horses. (Jer 12:5)
- C. Yeshua points to other examples: the Prophets who were before you. Look to those who have gone ahead of you in this to learn how to respond to trials and persecution. Look to the prophets, the missionaries of old, the Christians living in Iran, Indonesia and other closed nations.

III. Prophets, Missionaries, Martyrs and Today’s Persecuted Church – learn from those before you

- A. James 5:10-11 Consider the prophets. Be patient.

- B. Job was persecuted by Satan himself *and* falsely accused by his friends. “But now they mock me, men younger than I.” (Job 30:1)
- C. Elijah was persecuted by Ahab and Jezebel. (1 Kings 18,19)
- D. Elisha was jeered and mocked. (2 Kings 2:23-25)
- E. Zechariah was forsaken by the king and stoned to death for standing up against Asherah worship. (2 Chron 24:17-22)
- F. Jeremiah was thrown into a cistern and sank into the mud. (Jeremiah 38)
- G. Daniel and the Hebrews in Babylon were thrown into a furnace or put in the lion’s den when they refused to worship false gods. (Daniel 1-6)
- H. Amos was insulted and told never to prophesy again. (Amos 7)

IV. Missionaries & Martyrs

- A. Nate Saint, John Paton, Gladys Aylward, Lotti Moon, Corrie TenBoom, Mary Slessor, Brother Andrew, Richard Wurmbrand, William & Catherine Booth, Brother Yun, Marie Durand...
- B. Foxe’s Book of Martyrs, YWAM publishing: Heroes of the Faith series.

V. Persecuted Christians Today in other Countries: Pray for Today’s Persecuted Church

- A. Voice of the Martyrs: persecution.com
- B. Open Doors: opendoorsusa.org Open Doors publishes a yearly top 10 list of countries where Christians face the most persecution.
 - 2020 World Watch List Top 10
 - 1. North Korea
 - 2. Afghanistan
 - 3. Somalia
 - 4. Libya
 - 5. Pakistan
 - 6. Eritrea
 - 7. Sudan
 - 8. Yemen
 - 9. Iran
 - 10. India
- C. Back to Jerusalem does a similar list, but this year, they listed their #1 “country” as Social Media.

VI. Encouragement & Instruction from other Scriptures

- A. James 1:2-5 “*When* you face various trials” includes all kinds of trials. This builds maturity.
- B. James 5:7-11 Stand firm and be patient like the prophets of old.
- C. 1 Peter 1:6-7 You have had to suffer grief in various kinds of trials so that the genuineness of your faith may be found to result in praise and honor when Yeshua is revealed.” The word “various” here is ποικιλος which means many-colored. It is where we get the term “polka dot.” (Charles Swindol p. 135) We require a variety of types of trials to accomplish and prove in us different aspects of our faith and maturity.
- D. 1 Peter 2:18-25 Slaves, if you suffer for doing good, like Christ, you are commendable.
 - 1. Peter seems intent on making sure that Christians do not directly confront the status quo while he subtly subverts it. Peter instructs Christians not to upset the well-defined Roman social order (Man-wife, master-slave relations.) No philosophy or religion of the time would be seen as relevant if they didn’t address and support these social norms. (Jobes p. 181-191)
 - 2. Make sure you suffer not for doing wrong. See I.A.
 - 3. You identify with Christ when you suffer innocently.
 - 4. “By His stripes you were healed.” If Yeshua’s wounds accomplished something, so will yours.
- E. 1 Peter 3:8-17
 - 1. Live in harmony with one another. Especially the family of God, but everyone as well.

2. “Who is going to harm you if you do good?” dates 1 Peter before Nero so brutally persecuted Christians for doing good in 64-67 AD. (Jobes p. 227) So these Christians may have been experiencing only slightly harsher persecution than we do today.
3. If you suffer for what is right, you are blessed. The theme of the “Afflicted Sojourner” who nevertheless lives rightly is supported by the Ps 34 reference. (Jobes p. 226)
4. Don’t *look* for trouble. You may suffer. Generally, no, but it is a possibility. Don’t look for it at every turn! (Goppelt)
5. “Always be prepared to give the reason for your hope.” We should be able to respectfully defend their hope in Christ to anyone, even if legal charges are in view. (Jobes p. 230)
6. “Peter’s vision for how the Christian is to relate to even a hostile social situation is thought-provoking. He does not advocate a withdrawal from society for safety’s sake or a hostile counterattack on society. Rather, as Goppelt puts it, ‘Faith does not close doors to relationships... out of either fear or hate. It turns, rather, in openness to others, just as it turns to God.’” (Jobes p. 230)
7. Victory over the flesh. Christ’s victory over the authority of the flesh enables us to have the same victory. In our sufferings we share in Christ’s victory in overcoming our flesh.

F. 1 Peter 4:12-19

1. The foundation of a loving community is set in verses 7-11 enabling us to endure suffering.
2. Do not be surprised when you’re vilified and slandered.
3. When sufferings are added to you in this kingdom, glory is added to you in God’s kingdom.
4. Again, be careful you’re not persecuted for the wrong reasons, such as disrupting social norms with an overactive sense of freedom. Don’t criticize everything about the world: Roman society has many merits. Peter taught to adhere to it when possible. (Jobes p. 286)
5. Modern western society is in contrast with the Greco-Roman society of Peter’s day. Then, Christian life was in such contrast to society that one could not be a Christian and remain unrecognized. Modern Western society, however, has been so shaped by biblical ethics that values of Christians and nonbelievers have not necessarily been in sharp conflict. The western church may not be able to relate directly, the church has always been persecuted in some part of the world and this letter brings encouragement to those believers. (Jobes p. 287)
6. Jesus’ sufferings normalized and dignified suffering. (Jobes p. 288)
7. Peter consistently wants Christians to avoid hostility with the world inasmuch as we are not denying Messiah. (2:12-13,17; 2:18 - 3:7, 4:15)
8. “You bear that name.” Do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. Insults and slander for believers are intended to shame and marginalize those who believe in something so outrageous as a resurrected Jesus. But our real honor is in bearing His name and likeness in sharing in his character of endurance through trials.
9. “It is the time (ο καιρος) for judgment to begin with the family of God.” (4:17)
 - a. Suffering for righteousness sake is surely a “Kairos moment.”
 - b. God has always started judgement with His own people of faith. (Jer 25:29, Ez 9:5-6, Amos 3:2, Zech 13:9, Mal 3:-5)
 - c. This same order in judgment is in Matthew 25: the sheep are judged before the goats.
 - d. Many of those verses listed use the metaphor “refine them with fire like silver and gold” to mean that judgment is meant to perfect the character of those being judged.
 - e. However, unlike most of the examples from the prophets above, the disciples that Peter writes to are suffering not for rebellion but for following Christ well. Still, the metaphor holds and was a universal theme even used by Greeks like Seneca. (Jobes)

G. 2 Peter 3:3-5

1. Scoffers will come. “Jesus didn’t change anything.”

2. “Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it always has.” Discouragement from Matt 24:34. “This generation will not pass away until all these things happen.”
3. Don’t be discouraged and become a scoffer yourself! Yeshua tarries for a reason (2 Pet 3:9)

H. Rev 12: 10-11

1. The accuser will be hurled down! There’s a happy ending. They overcame *him*. There is hope! Consider what “the Lord finally brought about” (James 5:11). There is always hope for the persecuted believer. The reward in heaven will greatly exceed the pain here on earth.
2. By the blood of the Lamb
3. By the word of their testimony
4. They did not love their own lives so much as to *shrink back* from death.

VII. Closing Thoughts

- A. We are promised persecution in one form or another.
- B. Resist! Resist the devil and he will flee from you. “Lead us not into temptations but deliver us from evil” doesn’t ask or expect God to excuse us from hardship. In fact, “deliver us from evil” presumes that evil will befall us. But God will always provide a path to not sin during the hardship. Resist the temptation to give up, to blame God,
- C. It’s harder to go from great freedom to reduced freedom.
- D. It’s harder to imagine the coming glory and rewards in heaven than it is the pain that’s right here right now. As an exercise, use your imagination and the Word to gather ideas of what wonderful things lie ahead. If you can imagine it, it’ll be at least that good. If you can desire it, God has that and more in mind for you.
 1. Rev 2:17 promises, “To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.” Use your imagination and research to embrace what that manna could be. Is the name a new name for you? Vernon McGee suggests it’s a special *name for Yeshua* that is only appreciated by you. Interesting! That he would give you a keep-sake with a name/character trait of His that is revealed only to you – what a gift of gifts that we have to look forward to.

VIII. Closing Prayer (from Peder’s notes)

O Father help me to be more in love with You. Help me to suffer well for the sake of Your name and Your kingdom. O Yahweh strengthen me to continue to walk on Your narrow path with love and resolve. Keep me from arrogance toward the unbeliever. May I please You with the way that I follow You—even in the midst of persecution and slander from those who don’t yet see Your beauty.

Father, Free me from the lie that earthly blessing and ease are my sole inheritance. I pray You would stamp eternity on my heart. Bring a greater revelation to me of the age to come. Strengthen me that I would be a faithful witness, courageously proclaiming Your truths through my words, actions and responses to hardships.

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