



## **The Glory of Persecution #2**

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Welcome to GraceLife. Welcome to our study on the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes. We are finishing our study on the Beatitudes this morning. It has been a great opportunity and privilege for me to preach this material to you and to be encouraged as you have responded to the Word of God in your life.

Last week we started with Matthew 5:10-12 and I'd encourage you to turn there as we jump right into things today. Jesus said:

*Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

I've asked myself on more than one occasion over these past two weeks, "What is the profit of studying persecution in our environment?" Our persecution, to the extent that we have any, is rather mild and limited to family circumstances for most of us. We know nothing about being stoned. We know nothing about being beheaded. We know nothing about being encased in wax and crucified and lit as a candle for a perverse Roman emperor's garden.

But it is good for us to study persecution even when we are not suffering its effects. If we as the church of Christ in America today are having a comparative season of rest, there are two things we can conclude from that.

First, we should probably ask ourselves how much we (speaking collectively, not individually) are truly on the path of righteousness. If persecution for the sake of righteousness is the inevitable result of following Christ, and we know so little of it, what does that say about the state of righteousness in the church in America today?

That's one issue. But there's a second issue as well.

If we persecution is inevitable, we should study persecution while we have this time of rest so that we will be ready for it when it comes. Once it comes, there won't be time to gear up. The soldier is put through training boot camp before the battle. He doesn't gear up for battle when it is there. It is too late at that point.

So we need to know these things in advance. We need to settle these things in our hearts and be ready so that we can respond instinctively in a righteous and productive way when the persecution eventually comes. When it comes, your feelings will get hurt. You may get angry. You may be injured. And you will be inclined in your flesh to react against the seeming injustice of it all. You won't be thinking clearly *then* unless you think about it *now*.

That's why we are going to settle it now so we can respond with joyful strength, with the power of the Spirit of God upon us, when persecution come—in whatever form that it does come.

It is like setting aside money for unexpected expenses. You know that's going to happen. You just don't know what form it's going to take, so you prepare in advance. Then you are ready. Then you can rise to the occasion—and a glorious occasion it will be when we suffer for Christ.

In this series of two messages we are answering six key questions about persecution in the life of the believer. Last time we answered three of them and I'll just review those quickly for the benefit of our visitors and for those of you who weren't here last week.

### **1. Will True Christians Be Persecuted?**

The first question we asked was this: *Will true Christians be persecuted?* Simple enough question, simple enough answer. Yes. End of sentence, end of paragraph.

In some manner or form, persecution is inevitable for every true believer. 2 Timothy 3:12 says: "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." It is inevitable. Persecution in some manner or form will be the lot of every true Christian and so we embrace the opportunity to suffer for the one who suffered for us. That was the first question we answered last week.

### **2. When Will Persecution Come?**

Second question: *When will persecution come?* Answer to that question: There is no way to know. But chances are it will come in unexpected ways, at unexpected times, from unexpected people.

So when you start to encounter difficulty and strife with others because of your faith in Christ, don't be surprised by it. Don't be thrown off by saying, "I can't believe he would give me a hassle. I can't believe he would insult me. I'm so surprised at the government crack down." No—there is nothing to be surprised about. The Bible tells us that it will come and the only question is how it will come. So we are prepared for whatever persecution may come on account of our testimony for Christ.

But as I said last week, we need to be balanced about this. Persecution is not the unbroken pattern of life for all believers everywhere under all circumstances. We will go

through seasons of persecution and seasons of rest. But we have to be faithful through all of it. But sooner or later, persecution will come and we are ready for it when it does.

### 3. How Does Persecution Come to Us?

The third question that we asked last week: *How does persecution come to us?* The answer we gave was that persecution comes in many forms, some of which are more painful than others. The apostle Paul listed in 2 Corinthians 11 some of the forms of persecution that he faced.

He is comparing himself with the false apostles. One of the marks that he gives to prove the stamp of authenticity on his ministry was the extent of the persecution that he had undergone. Look at verse 23 of 2 Corinthians 11. He said:

*Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all of the churches.*

So summed up in that life of one man, the great apostle Paul, we see the variety of forms that persecution can take. Maybe it is verbal, maybe it is unfair treatment, maybe it is lost opportunity, maybe it is physical abuse. For Paul it included imprisonment; for eleven of the twelve apostles it included death. So persecution can come in any number of ways.

The form that Jesus focused on in Matthew 5 is simply the verbal kind. Verse 11:

*Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.*

So persecution comes to us in many different forms. Some of them are physically painful; sometimes it lasts a long time; sometimes it is brief. But in one form or another, it comes.

That brings you up to date on where we were last week and it brings us to our new material for today.

The fourth question that I would ask about persecution for you to consider today and understand the answer to is this:

#### 4. Why Will I Be Persecuted?

What is it about being a Christian that invites persecution? What is it that draws persecution to us like the north end of the magnet to the south end of the magnet? Why is persecution attracted to us?

Why will I be persecuted? The answer to that question is this: As Jesus explains it here, you will be persecuted for righteous loyalty to Christ. You will be persecuted for the righteous loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ. As we look at our text here in 5:10, Jesus said:

*Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

It is for the sake of righteousness. Notice the parallel statement in verse 11:

*Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.*

Those statements that are parallel, “on account of righteousness” and “on account of me,” show that Jesus is talking about a righteousness that is identified with the person of Christ. In the context of the whole Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount, he is talking about the expression of righteous character found in the Beatitudes. The one who is identified with Christ is the one who lives this life of righteousness and that is the one who will be persecuted.

Now this idea of being righteous as Jesus explains it here is more than just being good. As you read through the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, you see that righteousness is a whole orientation of life for Christ and his will. Christ and your devotion to him is the cause of the persecution that Jesus is talking about. He is not talking about simply having struggles on the job or struggles with your family or struggles in your neighborhood. The kind of persecution that Jesus is talking about here is a narrow kind of persecution that is tied up with being devoted to Christ and being like him.

And so when people, either unbelievers or uninformed Christians, challenge your Christianity, mock your faith, mock your walk with God, call you the extreme one, or wrong you to spite your profession of Christ, that is what Jesus is talking about. That is suffering and being persecuted for the sake of righteousness. It is wrapped up entirely with the person of Christ and not related to the earthly struggles of everyday life that even unbelievers could go through. Loyalty to Christ is the source of the suffering that he is describing here.

Now, that has some important implications for you. I want you to be encouraged by these words if you are suffering for Christ in that way. But at the same time, I don't want you to take a false comfort if you are suffering for the wrong reason. Not all opposition that a Christian faces falls under the definition of persecution Jesus uses here.

Christians who are obnoxious, proud, or lazy; or Christians who are judgmental and face opposition for it, do not inherit the blessing that Jesus describes here. That opposition is not related to the righteous character of Christ and devotion to him. That is simply receiving the consequences of being a jerk. If you are a jerk and suffer for it, you are on your own.

Similarly I want to say that Christians who provoke political conflict are in most instances not being persecuted for the sake of righteousness as Jesus describes it here. There is nothing in the Sermon on the Mount that talks about political activism. That is not what Jesus is talking about.

Or to give you another example that perhaps hits a little closer to home. Say you neglected your job duties for the sake of sharing the gospel with your coworkers. Your boss tells you not to, but you persist in neglecting your duties and then you are disciplined for that, that is not being persecuted for the sake of righteousness. That is simply appropriate discipline for failing to submit to your boss and receiving the consequences of your disobedience.

So we need to deal with ourselves very firmly here and not just take a lazy spiritual approach to this. We should not appropriate this blessing upon our lives for things that are just related to our character quirks or failure to be the kind of people that we should be. This is persecution for righteousness sake. This is persecution on account of Christ.

The Bible talks about this so much everywhere. I am just going to take you to one other passage to give you another perspective on it. In 1 Peter 4:12, it says:

*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you.*

He says don't be surprised by this. This isn't strange. This isn't unusual. You should expect this.

*But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of his glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evil-doer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but he is to glorify God in this name (1 Peter 4:13-16).*

*Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right (1 Peter 4:19).*

So beloved, persecution for the sake of Christ is not a surprising thing. As I said last week, we should be more surprised and troubled by our lack of persecution rather than

the mild forms that come to us. The Bible says repeatedly that persecution is a blessing to be expected. Don't be surprised by it.

But then it also as Peter says here—he also clarifies exactly what the source of righteous persecution is. Don't suffer for doing wrong. Don't suffer for being a meddler. But when you suffer for righteousness sake, glorify God, praise him, rejoice in him and trust him for the outcome.

So if persecution on account of righteous loyalty to Christ is inevitable, we need to know how to answer question #5 and this is where we spend most of our time this morning.

## **5. How Should I Respond to Persecution?**

When that persecution comes, how should I respond? The answer to this question, I would say, is this: Rejoice and put it into spiritual context.

And there is four aspects to the answer to this question that I want to lay out for you—four elements of it. Matthew 5:12. Jesus says:

*Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

### **a. Rejoice**

So how do you respond when persecution comes? First element of that is simply: *rejoice*.

Jesus says to rejoice and be glad. It is an emphatic statement that speaks of great delight and exaltation. It has the sense of leaping for joy. “Finally it is happening to me! Praise God Almighty, I have the stamp of authenticity on my faith that transcends any of the immediate, temporal consequences of it.”

You can rejoice and be glad because you understand that true believers suffer for Christ. As a true believer with love for the one who was crucified for your sins, you say, “I don't want to go through life untainted and untouched by persecution. I want to taste of the sufferings of Christ. I want to share in the fellowship of his sufferings.” You say, “Jesus, you know what this is like. We share an intimacy that we didn't have before. Praise the Lord.”

Jesus is not describing a grudging acceptance of the inevitable. This is no martyr's complex, “Well, I'm suffering for Jesus.” No—if you are truly suffering for Jesus, your heart is going to leap for joy. That's one way to know if you are suffering for the true sake of righteousness—you're glad for it.

Let's look at a couple of examples in the book of Acts that would help us see this in the early church. Acts 5:

*After calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for his name. And every day in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ (Acts 5:40-42).*

They had been flogged. They had been mocked. They had been humiliated. And yet they were rejoicing, looking at each other saying, “Isn’t this great? We’re suffering shame for the name of Christ—praise God.”

Then in Acts 16, Paul and Silas had preached and a ruckus had followed as a result. Look what happens:

*The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But about midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them (Acts 16:22-25).*

In the midst of this wretched persecution, they responded with unbridled joy—hymns of praise at midnight. They understood that their reward in heaven was great.

I am not saying that you need to be flogged to prove the reality of your Christian faith. I am saying that if we suffer lesser degrees of persecution, we ought to be all the more able to rejoice and praise God in it. It ought to be the response of our hearts.

If you haven’t suffered much persecution, there ought to be a nagging desire in you saying, “I wish I knew more of what this tasted like. I wish I knew something about that unbridled joy, leaping for joy for the sake of Christ in a real way, not a manufactured way as some churches would do.”

We can also make this point about rejoicing in a negative way. When you suffer for Christ, you must not retaliate. You must not return in kind. That would contradict meekness and other characteristics that we discussed earlier in these beatitudes. You can’t retaliate.

Christ didn’t retaliate when he was beaten and crucified. He is your perfect example. The way he responded to his sufferings is the binding example for your conscience. That’s the way you respond when you are mistreated. You must follow the example of Christ when you encounter lesser degrees of suffering for his sake, insults and the like. You don’t retaliate to those things.

I would go one step further. Not only must you not retaliate, you must not even feel resentment over it. You can't even feel resentment over it and be responding in a righteous way. God is the one who has ordained your circumstances. Christ is the reason for your sufferings and persecutions. And so when persecution comes, it is coming from his hand for his cause to accomplish good in your life. And so who are you to resent that?

No—you don't resent it, you just turn to God in humble submission and say, "Father, I want to rejoice even in this. I want to glorify you even in this. If I am suffering on your account, it is only an infinitesimal fraction of what Christ suffered to purchase my soul from my sin. So Father, I don't resent this at all—I rejoice in it. I am glad that I am found worthy to suffer for your sake."

So the command to rejoice in response to persecution is positive and it calls for great exultation. There is this rejoicing that fills your heart. And really if you understand that that's the command and that's what Jesus calls forth from you, there is no room in your heart for retaliation and resentment anyway.

So we train our understanding so that when I suffer for Christ, I don't lash back. When I suffer for Christ, I don't nurse resentment over it. I just expect it. This is inevitable. This is part of the grandeur of the Christian life. This is part of the nobility of being a disciple and I am glad for it because I am not living for this world anyway.

When you understand what Jesus is saying, you realize that he is calling for a supernatural response. This isn't natural. This is unnatural and that's the point. The response is engendered by the Spirit of God.

So we rejoice when we are persecuted. We are glad when it comes. We don't hide from it. We don't compromise to avoid it.

### **b. Pray for Your Persecutors**

But when we look at the other things that Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, there is more to our response than just internal rejoicing. In addition to rejoicing, you need to *pray for your persecutors*. Look at Matthew 5:43-45.

*You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*

So you pray for them. You respond with joy in your heart, joy toward God, gratitude that you are suffering for Christ sake. Then you consider your persecutors and pray, "God, would you bless them? Would you open their eyes? Would you bring them to saving faith?" If they are believers, you say, "God, would you help them grow?"



You can pray that way because you view your persecution from a biblical perspective. Why do people persecute us in the first place? We are just trying to live humbly and righteously and to be a peacemaker.

They are responding because they hate Christ. As you manifest the character of Christ, the blows that they would give to Christ they pass on to you because Jesus isn't present. You would take a blow for Christ, wouldn't you? Wouldn't you take a hit for Christ—take a couple of licks for Jesus after what he has done for us? Of course you would. That's the idea. You are his proxy now. You receive what they would give to him but can't because they can't get their hands on him.

But beloved, persecution comes because men and women are in sin and they are dominated by the devil. They are on the path that leads to eternal destruction. They are headed for hell. Their hatred for Christ and his disciples are merely symptoms of that terrible position—the same position, I might remind you, that you were in before Christ saved you.

So persecution doesn't make us bitter against our persecutors. It should call forth our compassion and understanding. You say, "Wait a second. Let me step back and take myself out of this. Why is this happening? Oh, yes. They are lost; they're damned. Eternal judgment waits for them." And you say, "Oh, God, this is terrible. It's not terrible that I'm persecuted. It's terrible that they don't know Christ." And you pray for them.

So when you are truly suffering for righteousness' sake, persecution does not make you bitter against your persecutors. Instead it turns you to prayer on their behalf. Just like Jesus did on the cross. "Father forgive them, they don't know what they are doing." Just like Stephen prayed in his martyrdom. Acts 7:59:

*They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep.*

He dying breath was spent in prayer for the ones who were killing him. Beloved, with that example recorded by the Spirit of God, with the example of our Lord, don't you think you can find it in your heart to pray for the people who are hassling you over your Christian faith? They are not stoning you. They are not whipping you. Just go to God and say, "God, don't hold it against them. Father, forgive them. God, open their eyes."

So if your family is getting on your case, turn their opposition against you into prayer for them. Let the energy of that persecution be what drives you to prayer—not for yourself, but for them. Intercede for them as a priest of God just like somewhere, someone sometime prayed for you before you came to Christ. A godly man or a godly woman feels great compassion for those who persecute them.

Whether you pray for your persecutors may be the best test on whether you are being persecuted for the sake of righteousness or for some other cause. If you are being persecuted for the sake of righteousness, your response is going to look like this—you are going to be rejoicing. You are not going to resent it. You are going to love your persecutor in one shape or another. When that's your response, you are almost certainly being persecuted for the sake of Christ, because a selfish, self-pitying reaction betrays anything to the contrary.

So we rejoice, we pray for persecutors and we love them just like Stephen did. It is incredible when you think about it. Boulders were falling down upon his head and he is praying for the ones whose hands threw them.

### **c. Remember Your History**

Well, there is a third thing that you need to do in response to the persecution. You not only rejoice, you not only pray for your persecutors, but thirdly, you need to *remember your history*.

When I say your history, I don't mean your personal history. I am talking about the history that Jesus is talking about in Matthew 5:12. Notice how he ties the rejoicing together here. He says:

*Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Remember your history. Think through the Bible. Cain killed righteous Abel. King Saul persecuted David. The Jews persecuted the prophets and then they collaborated with the Romans and killed Jesus. Saul persecuted the church before his conversion. Stephen was killed. James was beheaded. All the apostles were eventually martyred except for John—and he was exiled to a remote island.

We serve a crucified Lord. And the Christian church since the time of the apostles is just a continual, flowing river of blood of people who have died for the sake of Christ. Remember that history and put your persecution in that context. This is just the way it goes for the citizens of the kingdom of God as they live in this world.

So if you are suffering insults and rejections on account of Christ, rejoice and be glad because you stand in a noble tradition that is honored by God and you will inherit a grand reward when Jesus comes.

We don't think about this and talk about it nearly enough. Our heritage as believers is a heritage of suffering and persecution with countless noble men who went before us, refusing to compromise the faith. They shed their blood to hand it over to us, generation after generation after generation. Even today believers suffer in China at the hands of the government. Even today Christians in India suffer at the hands of the Hindus—and on it goes.

It is to our shame (and I am talking within the walls of this room) that we know so little about what our brothers and sisters are suffering for the sake of Christ around the world. Why are we so tied up in getting our purpose in life and having Jesus fulfill our needs and finding our best life now when people who share the same love for Christ as we do are paying a heavy price for it? That does not make sense.

Will we actually receive the blood-stained faith of those generations before us and then run when that same faith brings conflict to us? Or somehow turn that faith into a matter of worldly personal advantage? The shame of the thought! The shame of the thought! The problem is not with those who have shed their blood. The problem is with us. Why is that? One older writer well said:

*The witnesses for unwelcome truths have never had any where or at any time a life or easy task.*

We need to remember our history. If we are suffering light, momentary, temporary persecution for the sake of Christ, we should rejoice. We should pray for those who bring it to us. We should thank God that we are somehow putting our toes in the stream of the noble river that is coursing through the ages of time, all one day flowing into heaven itself.

#### **d. Reach Out**

So how do you respond to persecution? We said you should rejoice, pray, and remember your spiritual history. One more thing that the Bible teaches here in answer to that question. I would put it this way: *Reach out*.

One writer from about one hundred years ago said this: “It is persecution rather than prosperity that promotes the well-being and progress of the church.” That is a great statement. I can’t tell you how much it bothers me that evangelical authors are just selling millions and millions of books. I don’t begrudge them their royalties. I just cringe over what that says about us. Why are we so popular?

Our challenge in this time of comparative peace and prosperity is not to be lulled to spiritual sleep. We should not get too comfortable either with ourselves or with what is happening elsewhere.

We should not assume that our prosperity is going to last. We understand that if we lose our prosperity, if we lose our popularity, we are not going to protest to God when that happens. We are going to say, “Ah, now things are finally getting lined up the way they should be. Now reality is starting to conform to the Scripture”.

But while we are in this time of comparative prosperity, you and I have a responsibility to come alongside the Christians in our world who are being persecuted. Let me read a couple of passages to you. Hebrews 10:32-34 says:

*Remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and the lasting one.*

Part of persecution is that you endure it yourself. You feel the blows and get the insults. The other part of it is that when you see believers in Christ who are suffering that way, you go and get alongside them and say, “I’m with you. I’m going to help you. I’m going to nurse your wounds. I’m going to clean the cuts. I’m going to give you whatever it is that you need to sustain yourself during this time.”

You share in their sufferings even if you personally are not suffering. That is the only righteous way to think about our suffering brethren in the world. We can’t just sit back and let them have to go through it as if that doesn’t affect us. Of course it affects us. We are part of the same body of Christ. When the toe hurts, the hand feels it.

There is an illustration of this in 2 Timothy 1:15-18 says:

*You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains; but when he was in Rome, he eagerly searched for me and found me—the Lord grant to him to find mercy from the Lord on that day—and you know very well the services he rendered at Ephesus.*

Onesiphorus refreshed Paul. He had searched for him. He knew that Paul was suffering. He knew that Paul was in prison. When he is in Rome, he searches Paul out. Onesiphorus wasn’t content to not be persecuted himself. He said, “The great apostle is suffering. I’m there with him.” That’s the idea.

Beloved, from our position of prosperity, we must not ignore persecuted believers as if it is not our problem. It is our problem. We are joined with them. We don’t assume an attitude of spiritual arrogance that looks down on them in their weakness. We pray for them and look for ways to use what we have to help them in their suffering. That is the only righteous response to have when we are in a position of prosperity.

This is a big part of what animated us at Grace to You to get behind a project to translate *The MacArthur Study Bible* into Chinese. It is not because we are going to make a dime off of it. But we have all of these teaching resources and we wanted some of that to get in their hands and be a blessing to people who gather together like we do this morning under the cover of night, never knowing when their pastor is going to be hauled off and arrested. The least that we can do is to look for ways to share the abundance of our spiritual resources with them. We are not going to feel the blows for them, but the fact

that they are nameless, the fact that they are faceless to us does not change our responsibility. We need to be an Onesiphorus. We need to find them and say, “I’m with you.”

As your pastor, I’d love to see some of you take that upon yourselves from your position of prosperity and comparative comfort. Turn your thoughts to the persecuted church in the world today. Find out where they are and how you can help them. It will be a perfect way to express thanksgiving to God. “God, if you are not going to let me enjoy persecution personally, I’m going to find ways to help those who are. They’re not going to suffer alone as long as I’m here.” Beloved, I believe there is untold blessing waiting for the person who would take up that challenge.

Well, we have answered today why you will be persecuted and how you should respond to persecution. Rejoice, pray for them, remember your history, and then reach out if you are not suffering yourself.

But the final question I want to answer is this:

## **6. What Is the Reward for Persecution?**

The answer to that question is this: Great glory! Great glory! If we suffer persecution and endure it gladly, Jesus says there is great reward for it. Look back at Matthew chapter 5:12:

*Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great.*

Your reward in heaven is great. You have to continually evaluate persecution from an eternal perspective. Jesus says that persecution will receive a great reward from the hand of the Father. He honors the patient endurance of persecution. There is a sense in which the kingdom already belongs to you. Jesus says in verse 10: “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” You have been born into the kingdom. Christ reigns over you as king and you share in the blessings of that kingdom as a foretaste now.

But there is more to come. Ultimately, God will bring you into his eternal kingdom and there will be persecution no more. You will be surrounded by glory, surrounded by the love of God, and all opposition will cease.

The Bible doesn’t tell us all the details we might want to know about that reward. Our words could not express it anyway. But beloved, the reward will be great. It will be unmixed joy, unmixed glory, unmixed holiness, unmixed purity, unmixed wonder, and unmixed worship. No more sorrows, sighings or tears, no persecution, just full acceptance in the presence of God and Christ with unhindered access to him face to face.

Because faith looks to that eternal reward, today when we know that persecution, we can rejoice in it and say, “I believe the promise and I know I’m going to taste it. I know I’m

going to have that and I rejoice in it because my present difficult circumstances are not the end of the story.”

The apostle Paul knew that perspective when he said in 2 Corinthians 4:16 when he said that momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.

You need to remember that reward the next time your family hassles you. Keep that in mind the next time you suffer loss on the job because of your commitment to righteousness. God’s reward will be out of all proportion to your service and out of all proportion to your faithfulness. He is not a stingy God. The reward will be great. And as you are faithful with the few things, Jesus says you will be rewarded with many. The rejection of men simply proves that you belong to this great Christ and one day will be with him with joy inexpressible and full of glory.

Let’s pray.

*Father, with that great perspective in mind, the great perspective of being on a path that leads to glory, knowing that you are a God who doesn’t miss any of the details, knowing that you are a God who is great and gracious and despite our sinfulness will reward us in heaven as we suffer for Christ, Father, we take to heart the words that you said to Paul: “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness”. So Father, in the midst of persecution, in the midst of weakness, we would respond as Paul did. “Most gladly therefore, I would rather boast about my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”*

*Father, we are grateful for the peace that we enjoy that allows us to proclaim the gospel unhindered. We would ask you to give us grace to fulfill our responsibility fully. We don’t even ask for it to continue, Father, we just ask you to make us faithful and while this time of peace lasts, Father, may we lift up in our prayers before you our brothers and sisters in Christ who are suffering for the sake of the same faith. May you open great doors for us to be ministers to them, that they might stand strong for Christ and glorify you. Father, may they inherit a great reward for their faithfulness in circumstances more difficult than we face here.*

*We honor you. We glorify you. We trust you and submit ourselves to you.*

*For Jesus’ sake, Amen.*

*This transcript was prepared by Shari Main.*