

**Matthew**  
**The Persecuted**  
**Matthew 5:10-12**  
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Let me begin by saying that I think most of us wouldn't say that we have been persecuted. At least, that's not how I would think normally of myself. But when I think back over my life, I can identify the fact that it has, in fact, happened. The years that I worked in the construction trade as an electrician, men that I worked with deliberately told their filthiest stories when I was nearby to get a rise or to influence me in some way. When I lived and worked in the funeral home, in seminary, coworkers there would intentionally leave out dirty magazines so that I would be sucked into their sinful habits. I've been cursed out because of speaking the truth on several occasions. A liberal United Methodist pastor publicly ridiculed my faith in Scripture and in the reality of Jesus' resurrection. At Grace Community Church, one young man threatened to kill me because I spoke the truth to him. I've been mocked for my views on biblical issues.

Now don't misunderstand, I'm not painting myself as some great recipient of persecution. I'm simply making the point that, while we have not been persecuted like many of our brothers and sisters have been around the world with physical harm, if you're a Christian, you have experienced persecution. Because those who desire to be faithful to God, who desire to live lives of righteousness, have always been treated like this.

I mean, think about it, it happened when there were only four people on this planet and only one of them was an unbeliever. Genesis, chapter 4, verse 8, "Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him." That's how it has been ever since. I mean, just think about the Scriptures.

Starting in the Old Testament, the two million Jews that Moses brought out of Egypt wanted to stone him. 2 Chronicles 36:16 says that the nation of Israel continually "mocked the messengers

of God...and scoffed at His prophets.” According to Justin Martyr, they sawed Isaiah in half with a wooden saw. Jeremiah was thrown in a well. Ezekiel was mistreated badly. Amos was told to leave and deliver his prophecy somewhere else. In the New Testament, those who lived in those times said John the Baptist had a demon. Ten of Jesus' Apostles died as martyrs. In 2 Corinthians, chapter 11, verse 23-25, we learn that Paul endured “imprisonments, beaten times without number, was often in danger of death. Five times I (Paul) received from the Jews thirty-nine *lashes*. Three times I (Paul) was beaten with rods (by the Romans), once I (Paul) was stoned...” all because of his testimony for Jesus Christ.

And of course, the supreme example of the righteous being persecuted is our Lord. Matthew, chapter 11, verse 19, think about it, He was the eternal Son of God who took on flesh, who lived a perfect life, and they called him “a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!” In John 8:48, they called Him “a Samaritan,” a racial slur, and said that He was demon-possessed. Stephen says in Acts 7:52 that they murdered Jesus. The same thing has happened throughout church history. Many, like John Hus, Martin Luther, John Calvin, William Tyndale, or the Scottish Covenanters, were persecuted, and many of them were killed for their faith.

In the last Beatitude, Jesus tells us, sitting here in the 21st century, to expect exactly the same. We read it a moment ago in Matthew, chapter 5, verses 10-12. Let me call your attention to those verses. Although the word ‘blessed’ occurs twice in those three verses, they still only constitute one additional Beatitude. That's clear because the theme and vocabulary are the same in all three verses. And Jesus then gives the Beatitude in verse 10; it's the same form as the other beatitudes. And then in verses 11 and 12, He expands and personalizes it. Notice He changes from, in verse 10, “Blessed are those who have been persecuted” to “Blessed are you.” So in

these three verses then, we find the eighth Beatitude our Lord gave His Disciples that day. It's His final description of those who are in His spiritual kingdom. Jesus says, "If you are in my spiritual kingdom, if you are blessed spiritually, you will be persecuted because of your relationship to me and because of your pursuit of righteousness" (Paraphrase).

Now in these three verses, Jesus gives us several important insights into this whole issue of persecution so that we can better understand it. Let's look at these insights together. First of all, let's consider "The Forms of Persecution," the forms of persecution. The Greek word for 'persecuted,' you'll notice, as the English word, occurs in all three of these verses. The word originally meant 'to run after or pursue someone.' So it eventually came to mean 'to pursue someone in order to harass them, especially because of their beliefs.'

Now when we think of persecution, we tend to think only of physical harm, and certainly this Greek word includes that. But throughout church history, most Christians haven't faced physical harm. That's still true in today's world. There are certainly our brothers and sisters who do, as we sit here this morning, they're facing that reality right now. But many Christians on this planet will never face physical harm in their lifetimes. So, why does Jesus say then that persecution marks all true disciples of His? Because persecution includes much more than just physical harm. It includes that, but it includes other things as well. And Jesus defines what He means by persecution in verse 11. Being persecuted or harassed for Jesus' sake includes, first of all, "Verbal Insults." Look at verse 11, "When *people* insult you." The leading Greek lexicon defines that word 'insult' as 'to find fault in a way that demeans another,' 'to reproach, revile, mock, heap insults upon as a way of shaming.' If you're a Christian, you are going to face the reality of verbal insults. Sometimes, they're said to your face; sometimes, they're said to others. Often, they're written on the internet. Sometimes those insults are loud and direct. Other times,

they come as whispers behind our backs. But often, Jesus says, “Persecution will consist of verbal insults.” And again, if you doubt that, just go to some Christian websites that have open comments and look at what unbelievers say about us.

A second form of persecution Jesus highlights here is “Personal Harm.” Notice in verse 11, He says, “When...they persecute you.” Now, in verse 10, the word ‘persecute’ is used more generically for all forms of harassment. But here in verse 11, while it's listed with the others, it's specifically talking about all types of personal harm. If you look through the Scriptures and you look at the forms of personal harm, it includes things like being targeted by governmental laws, or governmental rules, or even governmental officials. It means being singled out for ill treatment, sometimes having your possessions taken away, being arrested, beaten, imprisoned, tortured, or even martyred. In some places in the world, having your church building burned down; it takes so many different forms. If you want to read about the expectation of this, read Matthew 10, verse 16 and following, where Jesus promises there'll be plenty of physical harm in the lives of Christians throughout church history, beginning in the first century. Many of our brothers and sisters around the world today face this constantly. Do you ever think about them? Listen, we should remember them and pray for them; we're commanded to do so. Hebrews, chapter 13, verse 3, “Remember the prisoners (Listen to this.), as though in prison with them, *and* those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.” So let me ask you, “When was the last time you thought about and prayed for our Christian brothers and sisters who right now, in other places in the world, are facing physical harm because of the testimony of Jesus Christ?”

A third form of persecution is “Lies and False Accusations.” Again, in verse 11, Jesus says, “when...(they) falsely say all kinds of evil against you.” Notice the word ‘falsely;’ they're

saying evil against you, but it's not true. They are lying. Jesus says, "Listen, you ought to expect the unbelievers around you to lie about you and to make false accusations against you." It happened in the first century in Acts, chapter 6, verse 11, "They secretly induced men to say, 'We have heard him (Stephen) speak blasphemous words against Moses and (blasphemous words) against God.'" It was a lie, but they were happy to say it. Understand, if you're in Christ, you will be lied about.

Now, those are the three forms that Jesus lists here, that Matthew writes, that Jesus listed that day, but Luke tells us in Luke 6:22, that in that same sermon, at that same time, Jesus added three other kinds of persecution. Look at Luke 6, verse 22. Verse 22 says, "Blessed are you when men hate you." "Settled Hatred" is another form of persecution. Why would unbelievers often hate us? Well, Jesus explains in John 15, verses 18 and 19. He says, "If the world hates you," that is, if the world of unbelievers hates you, you know, here it is, "that it has hated me before it *hated* you." The world hates us because they hate Jesus. He says, "If you were of the world," if you really belonged, "the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you." You just don't belong anymore; they know that; you know that, and they hate you for it.

A fifth form of persecution is "Social Ostracism." Again, Luke 6:22 adds, they will "ostracize you." This Greek word means 'to discourage or eliminate contact with someone,' to discourage or eliminate contact with someone. In other words, it means that unbelievers will exclude you from their events, from their companionship, from their circle, because of your faith and your righteous conduct. They're going to cut you out of those things; everybody else is invited, but not you.

A sixth form is “Personal Contempt.” Again, Luke 6:22, they will “scorn your name as evil.” Literally, the Greek text says, “They will throw out your name as evil.” One lexicon defines it as ‘having open disdain for someone.’ You see, unbelievers often have open contempt for us because they think we are unworthy and inferior. They think we're not as intelligent because we believe in all this religion stuff. They think that we are leaning on a crutch instead of able to stand on our own two feet, and on and on it goes—they look at us with contempt.

So then, understand, according to Jesus, persecution comes in all of these shapes and sizes. It can be a verbal insult to your face or behind your back. It can mean you're ostracized because you don't fit in. It can mean you're kept out of conversations. You're not invited to certain events. You may be hated for being “too good to hang out with us; you just think of yourself as holy.” Sometimes it means you're passed up for the promotion at work because you won't go along with what everybody else is doing, or perhaps even shady business practices. If you're a student here this morning, you may be ridiculed for your commitment to sexual purity or other biblical priorities. Or maybe you're just left out because you don't laugh at all the off-color sexual innuendo and jokes. So persecution comes in all of those forms.

Most of them, note this, aren't physical violence, but their attitudes toward us, words spoken to or about us, or just being socially excluded. Kent Hughes was right when he says, “Most persecution is quite civilized.” Jesus says, however, “All of those who truly belong to His kingdom,” notice what He says, “have been persecuted.” Those who belong to his kingdom will experience persecution in these forms. You say, “Wow! Where does this persecution come from?” I'm not going to belabor this. Let me just give you a short list of where it comes from. First of all, it comes from all unbelievers. 1 John, chapter 3, verse 13, “Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world (that is the world of unbelievers), hates you.” Secondly, it can even come

from your family. Jesus says in Matthew 10, verse 36, “A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD.” If you have unbelieving family, you understand this. It can come from government. Read Daniel 3 and Daniel 6, where Nebuchadnezzar and even the ruler, Darius, persecute Daniel and his friends because of their stand for righteousness. It can come from false religion; you see that throughout the New Testament. It can come from false Christianity. In 2 Corinthians 11:25, Paul says a lot of what he and the believers in Corinth were facing was from false brethren and false apostles, those attached to the Christian faith who weren't really Christians at all. And of course, the ultimate source behind all persecution that you and I face is Satan himself. Revelation 2, verse 10, “the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.” Behind every moment you face persecution of any of these kinds, it ultimately traces back to Satan. He is God's arch enemy, and in attacking you, he's attacking God. That's why Peter says in 1 Peter 5:8, “Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” In context, that's open persecution; that's what it's talking about, he's looking to devour you with persecution. So, those are the various forms of persecution, and that's a little list of where they come from.

Now, that brings us to a second insight in our text. Jesus here provides us with “The Reasons for Persecution.” Now, think with me for a moment before we look at the reasons Jesus gives, sometimes, even non-Christians are persecuted for doing what's right, for standing against the wrongs in their culture; that happens. Other times, unbelievers are sinfully persecuted simply because of differences like ethnicity, as the Jews were in World War II. And those things are wrong, they're sinful, and God, who is just, will punish every one of those sins. But Jesus here is not saying that persecuted unbelievers are blessed. Frankly, he's not even saying that even all

Christians are blessed when they're persecuted. Why? Because, brothers and sisters, we can be persecuted for “The Wrong Reasons.” You say, “Well, what are wrong reasons?” Well, let me give you a little list.

Here are some wrong reasons to be persecuted. Because we have “Unattractive, sour personalities.” Because we have “Rude, thoughtless words and actions.” Because we sort of reflect this “False, pompous, super-spirituality, self-righteousness.” Four, “Proud, judgmental attitudes.” “Lazy, irresponsible work habits;” if your boss is giving you a hard time at work, and you don't work hard in a way that brings honor to Christ, that may not be persecution. “Unwise, foolish, offensive methods.” Sometimes people are persecuted because of that. When I think of that, I always remember, when I was at *Grace to You*, I was responsible to oversee the trips, the international trips, that those who wanted to travel with us took. And one time, we took about 400 people to Israel. We were on an El Al international flight. And literally, I'm not making this up, there was a lady who woke up other passengers in the middle of the night to pass out tracts. What she got wasn't persecution; she deserved every bit of it.

There are only two reasons, Jesus says, that persecution make a person blessed. Let's look at “The Right Reasons.” The first right reason is “Because (verse 10) of Righteousness.” Notice what He says, “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of (or, because of) righteousness.” Now, the word ‘righteousness’ here refers ‘to practical righteousness.’ When you're persecuted because you display righteousness in your thinking, in your attitudes, in your actions, when you desire to be and to do what's right, if that's true of you, Jesus says, “those who don't desire to be and do what's right will hate you and will persecute you for it.” In context, Jesus is actually saying, “If your life is characterized by the qualities in the first seven Beatitudes, then you're going to be persecuted.” Why? Because that doesn't fit; it doesn't fit the



world we live in. That's why Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:12, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." You say, "Now, why are we persecuted because of righteousness?" You know, I think there's a very powerful insight that John the Apostle makes in 1 John 3:12. He's talking about Cain and why Cain killed Abel. Listen to what he says, "Cain, *who* was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brothers were righteous." That's why Cain killed Abel. Abel's righteousness highlighted his (Cain's) own sinfulness, and that's why he hated him, and that's why he persecuted him, ultimately by killing him. And that is the same motive when we've been persecuted for righteousness' sake. It's because our efforts to be right before God, to live in a way that honors Him, highlights the sinfulness of the people around us, and they resent us for it. That's the reason, "because of righteousness."

There's a second right reason, and that's "Because of Jesus." Look at verse 11, He says, "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me." By the way, "because of," there in verse 11, is exactly the same Greek word as "for the sake of" in verse 10. It means 'because of,' okay, "because of Me." Jesus means, "you're blessed when you're persecuted because of your relationship to Me"—when you've confessed Jesus as Lord, when you believe in Jesus, when you're seeking to follow Him and obey Him. Now this makes perfect sense. I mean, the first century world hated Jesus, and our world still hates the real biblical Jesus, certainly not the fabricated version of the culture, the cults or false religion, but the true Jesus, the righteous Jesus who confronts their sin—they still hate that Jesus. And since they hate Him and can't get at Him, they attack us. I've often shared with you an illustration that one of my seminary professors used, I have never forgotten it. He said, "If you walk into a room, and you see someone with a picture of his or her spouse, and

they're poking holes in that picture with a pencil, and they're cutting it into pieces, and they're putting it in a trash can and burning it with fire, what does that tell you about their relationship to their spouse? They're attacking the image because they hate the one it represents.” That's exactly what happens when unbelievers attack us. They can't get at God, but they hate God, and so they attack His image reflected in us.

Look at John 15, Jesus makes this so clear, John 15. I already mentioned verses 18 and 19 to you. John 15:18, “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it *hated* you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this, the world hates you.” And then look at verse 20, “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me (And did they? Yes!), they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.’” In other words, however they responded to Jesus, they're going to respond to us. “But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me.” So, the only persecution for which Jesus promises blessing is when they don't like the righteous way we live, or they reject the Jesus we follow.

So, why aren't more Christians persecuted today? Kent Hughes writes this:

It's because the church has become like the world. If you want to get along, the formula is simple. Approve of the world's morals and ethics, at least outwardly. Live like the world lives. Laugh at its humor. Immerse yourself in its entertainment. Smile benignly when God is mocked. Act as if all religions converge on the same road. Don't mention hell. Draw no moral judgments. Take no stand on the moral political issues of our times. And above all, don't share your faith. Follow this formula, and it'll be smooth sailing.

Instead, brothers and sisters, we must remain committed to personal righteousness and to Jesus Christ, regardless of what it costs.

About 150 years after Jesus lived, a man approached the church father, Tertullian, and he was explaining to Tertullian that his business was suffering because of his faith, and he was considering making some changes. And he said, “What can I do? I must live.” Tertullian's response, I think, shocked him when he said, “Must you?” He was making the point that the true Christian must choose righteousness and loyalty to Jesus Christ even over life itself and anything else that gets in the way.

There's a third insight in our text that Jesus addresses about persecution, and that is “The Response to Persecution.” You see, even when we are persecuted for the right reasons, for righteousness, for Jesus' sake, we can still be tempted to respond sinfully. You say, “Tom, how do you respond sinfully to persecution?” Well, here are some unbiblical responses. First of all, “Surprise.” 1 Peter, chapter 4, verse 12 says, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among (overtakes) you.” Listen, don't be surprised if you're persecuted, but if you aren't.

Another unbiblical response is “Bitterness.” That's easy for us when someone unfairly attacks us, it's easy to respond with bitterness, but we have to respond like our Lord and like Stephen with a spirit of forgiveness. Jesus says, “Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they do.” Or like Stephen, as he's being stoned, “Do not hold this sin against them.”

Don't respond with “Revenge.” In fact, look at Matthew, chapter 5, down at verses 43-44: “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.” Don't seek revenge, love them and pray for them.

And finally, another unbiblical response to persecution is “Discouragement.” Paul talks about that in 2 Corinthians, chapter 4, and he says, “In affliction and in persecution, don't despair, don't despair” (Paraphrase). Those are the wrong ways to respond.

Now, persecution, thankfully, isn't constant in our lives in most cases. There are seasons in every life. But when you do experience persecution, Jesus explains “The Biblical Response.” Look at verse 12, and this is shocking—“Rejoice,” rejoice!” The word means ‘to be in a state of happiness and well-being.’ Jesus demands that when we're insulted, when we're ostracized, when we're attacked for His sake or righteousness' sake, force yourself to be filled with joy. And then He adds in verse 12, “and be glad.” The word means ‘to be exceedingly joyful, to be overjoyed.’ And Luke says that our Lord added, “and leap for joy.” Think about one of the happiest moments in your life. You were so overcome with joy that you wanted to respond physically. Jesus says, “When you're persecuted, do that.” You say, “Wait a minute, Tom, I mean, is that even possible? Can anyone truly respond to persecution with joy?” I would say, “Not naturally, but with the work and power of the Holy Spirit, we can.”

I mean, think about Acts 5, verse 41, the Apostles had been imprisoned and flogged, and then released, and “they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His (Jesus') name.” That's not natural, but the Holy Spirit can empower us to do that when the moment comes. Or take Acts 16:25, Paul and Silas had been arrested, they had been beaten, they had been imprisoned and put in stocks. And “about midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God.” Listen, “I can't respond biblically to persecution on my own, and neither can you, but God's Spirit in us can enable us to respond just like this when it comes.” By God's grace, this has been the saints' response throughout church history, and it must be ours. But how?

How can we respond with joy and gladness? How does the Holy Spirit equip and enable us? We have to remind ourselves of “The Blessings of Persecution,” as Jesus does here. We have to remind ourselves, we have to remind ourselves of what Jesus says right here. I love the story from Spurgeon's biography. The biographer records a time when Spurgeon was really low. He suffered a bit from melancholy anyway, but he was really low about the criticism that he was receiving against him and his ministry. His wife saw that this was really burdening him down. He wasn't responding as our Lord says here. And so, his wife, Susanna, and every man needs a wife like this, she wrote all of the Beatitudes, including this final one, in large letters, and she tacked it to the ceiling over his bed. Why? Because she knew he needed to remind himself of what Jesus says here. That's how we can respond to persecution in this way, we must remind ourselves.

Now, notice Jesus says, in verse 10, that all of those persecuted for His sake and for the sake of righteousness are “blessed.” They belong to Him; they are spiritually in God's favor—they're blessed! And that is entirely counterintuitive, because by nature, we all want to be liked, and we all want to be respected. And in the first century, there was an additional complication, the rabbis taught that God was only pleased with those who were honored and respected, and those who were being mistreated probably deserved it because they were out of God's favor. And Jesus turns that whole conventional wisdom on its head, and He says, “It's the persecuted that are blessed.” Now, don't misunderstand. Jesus isn't teaching here that you need to like persecution. That's masochistic; that's not biblical Christianity. Lloyd-Jones puts it well. He says, “Persecution is always something the Christian should regret. It should be to him a source of great grief that men and women, because of sin, should behave in such an inhuman and devilish manner. So he never rejoices in the fact of persecution.” You see, we rejoice not

because of persecution itself, but because of the two divine blessings that come with persecution.

Our persecution doesn't earn these blessings, but they're expressions of God's grace that come with persecution. The first, and this is amazing, is “Assurance,” assurance. Persecution shows our faith is genuine and that brings assurance. How does that happen? Well, when you go through persecution, and you remain true to Christ, and you continue to believe in Him, and you continue to live for Him, it shows you're the real thing, and that confirms to you that you're the real thing. As I pointed out before, six of the Beatitudes promise a future blessing, but the first Beatitude and this last one are not promises of future blessings, but Christ's assurance that those who display these qualities are already in His spiritual kingdom right now, look at verse 10, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The one who faces persecution because of righteousness or because of his confession of Jesus as Lord and endures that persecution, continues to believe, continues to follow Christ, demonstrates the reality of his or her faith. It's exactly what Peter says in 1 Peter, turn over to 1 Peter 4, verse 12:

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; 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. (Now watch verse 14.) If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because (that proves to you, that) the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you (You're the real thing.). Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or a thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed but is to glorify God in this name.

It shows you're a Christian! I mean, compare what verse 14 says with the response of the false Christian, someone who claims to have believed, but hasn't really. In the parable of the soils in Matthew 13, you remember Matthew 13:21, a false Christian, a person who makes this profession of faith but isn't real, Jesus says "when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away." That's how a person who is not a genuine Christian responds to persecution. But when you experience persecution, and you remain faithful to Christ, you continue to love Him and follow Him and obey Him, you show that you really are in His spiritual kingdom. Look at verse 12 of our text, "for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." When we're persecuted because of Christ or because we're trying to do what's right before Him, don't be surprised, don't be discouraged; instead, rejoice and be glad because it shows you are in the company of the righteous throughout human history. And that means you can have assurance that you really do belong to Him, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

I want to comment on one other passage. So responding to a persecution and following Christ, loving Christ, enduring that persecution shows you're a Christian. On the other hand, if you aren't persecuted for righteousness' sake, you aren't persecuted because of Christ, Jesus says it means you're not really a Christian. That's what He says. Luke tells us, in Luke 6, verse 26, that when Jesus pronounced this Beatitude, this blessing, "Blessed are those who are persecuted," He, at the same time, pronounced a sentence of judgment. He said, "Woe *to you* when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way." In other words, it doesn't mean unbelievers can't like you or some of them can't respect you or appreciate your attempts to live a good life, that happens. But He's saying, "If everybody in your life thinks you're a great guy, there's something wrong with you." You don't really belong to Christ

because you're not living out Christ-like attitudes and actions in your life, and that's why they don't hate you. You're not really a Christian at all. So, for those who do endure persecution, who do go through it, remain faithful, there's assurance.

There's a second blessing that comes with persecution and that is "Reward," reward. Look at verse 12, "Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great." God is going to greatly reward you for facing persecution and remaining faithful through it. You say, "Wow! That's great, Tom, what's the reward? What reward will we receive for enduring the world's insults and ostracism and all of those other things?" Well, let me show you. Turn to Matthew, chapter 25; Matthew 25, there's a parable called "The Parable of the Talents," and I don't have time to walk you through everything in this parable, but essentially, it's being faithful on earth, and then Jesus talks about the rewards that those who've been faithful here will receive and it's fascinating. Look at Matthew 25, verse 21, for those who've been faithful, the Master will say to him, "Well done, good and faithful slave." The first reward that you will receive in heaven is "The Praise of The Lord." Can you imagine what it will be like, having been insulted here, having been criticized here, having people talk about you behind your back, pass you over for promotion, lie about you, can you imagine what it will be like to stand before Jesus Christ, the Lord of the universe, and Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant?"

The other part of the reward is "A greater capacity for service in eternity." Look again at verse 21, "His Master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful (here in this life) with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things (in eternity); enter into the joy of your Master.'" Your faithfulness here not only will bring the praise of Jesus Christ, but it will bring to you a greater capacity to serve him forever. Those are rewards worth living for and worth being faithful for.



So how can we rejoice and be glad when we're persecuted? How can we remain spiritually stable in these tumultuous, difficult times when persecution, clearly against believers, is on the rise? How do we remain stable? How do we remain faithful? Let me give you two summary points. Number one, remember this is not your home—live for eternity. Jesus says here, “Remind yourself this isn't home!” But your faithfulness here as a sojourner will one day bring eternal reward, the praise of your Lord, and a greater capacity for service in eternity. Stop living like this is all you have. Remember this is not your home.

And secondly, if you want to live a stable life in the midst of the persecution that's on the rise in our world, then remember God is on His throne. God is still in complete control of everything unfolding on this planet. There is still not one stray molecule in God's universe. What's happening across our world and even in our country is not random. It's not out of control. It's not ultimately driven by evil people. It is instead under the direction of an all-powerful, all-wise, all-good God, our Father, who is seeking to accomplish His eternal plan of redemption. Read Revelation. He's already written the end of the story. And He's written every chapter between now and then. So you have a choice, Christian. You're on the bus, Jesus is driving the bus, He knows where He's going, He knows the route He's taking. So you have two choices; you can either sit on the bus with white knuckles grabbing the seat in front of you, living in fear, or you can sit back and enjoy the journey, but you're going the same place either way. So, live like a Christian, share the Gospel, speak the truth boldly, kindly and graciously, but boldly, and endure whatever persecution that brings, and rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven!

Let's pray together. Father, forgive us for living at times like this world is all that matters. Help us to live like our Lord admonishes us here, to rejoice and be glad because this is not our home. And help us not to be afraid because You are still on Your throne. Father, I pray that You would

help us to be faithful, whatever comes, just like the saints before us have been, to finish well and to live, not for the world's approval, but to hear our Lord say, "Well done."

Father, I pray for those here this morning who claim Jesus Christ, but if they are honest with themselves as they have looked in the mirror of Your Word this morning, they realize everybody likes them, the world likes them, unbelievers all like them because there's no difference. Lord, help them to see they're not really a Christian at all. Bring them to true faith and repentance this morning by believing in Your Son, in His perfect life, His substitutionary death for all who would believe in Him, satisfying Your justice, and His glorious resurrection. Lord, may they repent and believe in Him to the saving of their souls. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.