

## Sermon: Blessed are those who are persecuted

Matthew 5:10-12

### Why is persecution inevitable?

If you follow Jesus, you will be persecuted.

John 15:20

Increasingly, disagreement is considered hate.

Your righteousness is an indictment of all sin.

You will suffer no matter what life you choose.

1 Peter 3:15-17

Only those persecuted for righteousness are blessed.

### Your response to persecution shows your faith

Acts 5:17-26

True believers conquer fear with faith.

Acts 5:27-40

The ultimate power is always God's.

Acts 5:41-42

### The result of persecution

Those who are persecuted *for Jesus' sake* receive the kingdom of heaven.

## Study: Blessed are those who are persecuted

### Getting to know you

1. Sunday's sermon was on the blessing of persecution. Is there anything you would like to add, question, or comment on about the sermon?
2. Have you ever felt criticized or mistreated because of your faith in Christ? If so, how did you feel? How did you respond?

### Going deeper

3. Read Colossians 1:24. Read James 1:2-4. How does this teach us to react to persecution?

Not only are we to endure persecution; we are to rejoice in it. In a way, we are not complete and mature until we have undergone persecution. There is something about opposition that will either destroy our faith (in which case it was an inadequate faith) or will purify and strengthen it.

4. What do you think Paul meant in Colossians 1:24 when he said he was filling "up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions"? What could be lacking in Christ's suffering? How does the church *need* persecution such as Paul's?

Jesus' work of redemption was completed on the cross. He said, "It is finished." We don't need anything else to be saved. However, the testimony that comes from those who give up everything because of their faith in Christ is so important. It tells the church and the world that there are people who believe and trust God so deeply that they are willing to suffer persecution, confiscation, torture, and even death. The steadfast faith of the apostles who were executed is one of the greatest evidences for the truth of their testimony. Each generation of martyrs causes the world to take note that there is something powerful in the gospel message.

5. We noted in the sermon that we in the United States have faced a very low level of persecution compared to much of the world and much of church history. While this may be changing, it is still largely true. If persecution is necessary for the church, what might the church in America be lacking because of our relatively tolerant culture?

Most of us have not had our faith tested to the extreme measures. We have thus not been able to demonstrate to non-believers, to each other in the

church, to our selves, or even to God, the sacrificial faith of the martyrs. We may therefore have not developed the faith that is willing to put God first in everything, everyday.

6. As opposition grows in our culture, how would you like to respond? How would you like the church as a whole to respond?

I think when we are criticized, we should first try to learn from it. Maybe some of the criticism is justified or at least contains a grain of truth. We should be willing to acknowledge where we have failed and change for the better.

Criticism that is partially or even completely unjustified should be met with a loving response. Our fight is not against flesh and blood. Christianity's harshest critics are still sinners for who Jesus died. We should pray for them to repent and be saved.

We should not be shocked when criticized or even persecuted. Jesus promised as much. We should accept it as coming from a world system that does not understand and that is under the spell of the evil one.

We should rejoice. God obviously must have a plan to bring good out of anything that we have to face in this life.

### Going deeper

7. We have spiritual brothers and sisters who are facing levels of persecution including extreme levels. How should we respond to their situations?

We certainly should pray for them.

We can encourage our own nation to press their cause. The congress just last month passed a bill calling on persecuting countries to respect the human right of freedom of religion.

We can support organizations that help those impacted by persecution.

We can encourage our country to accept refugees who are fleeing religious persecution.