

Matthew 5:13-16

Responding to Persecution

CONTEXT

The ministry of Jesus is now in full swing. Using Capernaum as His base of operations, He is traveling throughout the region of Galilee teaching and preaching the gospel of the Kingdom and displaying the power of His kingdom through miraculous deliverance from sickness, disease, and demonic possession.

The miraculous nature of His ministry has captured the attention of the people from the surrounding regions, and we read at the end of chapter 4 that great multitudes of people were not only coming to Him for healing but also following Him intending it seems to be His disciples.

After seeing these multitudes, Jesus walks to a hillside not far from the town of Capernaum where He sits to teach them, laying out for them the principles of His kingdom and what it will really look like to be one of His followers.

I imagine that as Jesus took the posture of a teacher in sitting, there would have been a hush to fall over the crowd and as He raises His voice to speak, He begins with these words...

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

*Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth."*

Jesus doesn't begin by establishing His authority, instead He begins by identifying the characteristics that would mark the citizens of His kingdom and receive blessing from God.

His message is different from anything you have heard, and while He doesn't establish His authority directly you recognize that He doesn't need to because, you sense His authority through His message, and it is far greater than anything you had experienced from other teachers.

John tells us in His gospel that while standing before Pilate Jesus answered the question, *"Are you the king of the Jews"* in this way.

John 18:36-37

36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

37 Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?"

Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the

world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

The sermon on the mount then stands as a declaration of this heavenly Kingdom, a manifesto of sorts where Jesus lays out important principles that are to govern those who are the citizens of His heavenly kingdom while they remain on earth.

In the first 11 verses, we looked at the be-attitudes as Jesus looks to first deal with the character of His followers before dealing with their conduct.

- In them He addressed the **attitude of the disciple toward self, sin, God, and others.**

Toward self – we ought to recognize our spiritual poverty and have a meek estimation of ourselves.

Toward sin – we ought to mourn.

Toward God – we ought to hunger and thirst for righteousness and maintain a heart of purity.

Toward others - we ought to show mercy and make peace.

He closes these thoughts by promising blessing to those who may be persecuted for Him, instructing His followers of the

attitude they are meant to have when they are faced with persecution.

SERMON INTRO

In following Jesus have you ever felt like you are alone in society, at school, in the workplace, or even at home? Have you ever wondered what difference you're really making, are you really making an impact for Christ? Have you ever tried to live right, to speak up, but been shut down and abused by the world? Have you ever responded to times like this by shutting down, being quiet, or abstaining from anything that might segregate you, make you stand out, cause offense, or bring persecution?

In our time we are facing new levels of social persecution. Increasingly the world is calling good evil and evil good, and Biblical principles that were once widely accepted by the world are Not only being challenged but are being called hate speech.

We may not be facing the extreme persecution felt by our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world where following Christ might cost their lives, but we certainly live in a time and a place where people may revile us or say all manner of evil against us because we follow Jesus.

It seems that the world is unifying against the church telling her to keep quiet, like we are living in the days of Noah where the world grows increasingly hostile toward God preparing themselves for judgment while ignoring all the warning signs of their impending doom.

How should we respond in such times? When people all around us are telling us to keep quiet, should we keep quiet? When the world around attempts to conform us to their standards, do we conform? Should we grow weary and discouraged? Should we retreat into our homestead imagining it like an ark hoping God's judgment begins soon?

READ 5:10-11

1. Rejoice Exceedingly - READ 5:12

- The natural response to slander and persecution is anger, vengeance, sorrow, and discouragement, but the calling of our King is to respond to these things with joy!

QUESTION: How can we do that?

ANSWER: By considering our future and remembering those who have gone before us.

- Jesus tells His followers to rejoice in times of persecution not because persecution is desirable, enjoyable, or comfortable – but because it is temporal. It will not only **pass**, but it will also **produce** eternal reward!

Rom 8:18-19

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

- Jesus not only points us to the future reward of persecution, but He also points us to the past example of the prophets.

NOTE: When you study the Bible, you can clearly see that the prophets who remained faithful to God never escaped worldly persecution. This was one of Stephens points in Acts 7:52, just before he was stoned to death outside of Jerusalem.

- In our circumstances, we can look back not only to the prophets but to our King Himself. If we follow a King that was persecuted by the world, why would we think that we should escape such things?

John 15:18-19

18 "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

APPLICATION: Being a citizen of Christ's kingdom puts you at odd with the world's views and values, and we should not only anticipate persecution we should learn to rejoice exceedingly in it!

EXAMPLE: The Apostles

Acts 5:40-42

40 And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. 42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

- I believe that a major reason we can rejoice in persecution for Jesus comes from a recognition of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done for us.

NOTE: While anger, sorrow, and discouragement may be some ways that we might respond naturally to persecution, another natural response is to avoid persecution by conformity.

2. Remain Salty - READ 5:13

- Jesus doesn't teach the citizens of His kingdom to become salt, He states that they are salt!

NOTE: After describing to them the attitudes that should mark their lives, Jesus challenges them to remain and retain their saltiness!

- While it is true from a scientific perspective that sodium chloride cannot lose its saltiness - in the time of Christ, and in the region where He ministered salt was often sourced from around the dead sea. This salt would at times contain other minerals, causing a weak and unpleasant taste. Such salt would often be thrown onto the streets where it would at least keep the walking paths clear of weeds.

NOTE: Salt has a variety of uses, three of the most important uses are:

➤ **Salt Provides Flavor:** It brings flavor to bland food.

Job 6:6

6 Can flavorless food be eaten without salt?

Or is there any taste in the white of an egg?

APPLICATION: As the followers of Christ, our inward character ought to be unique and bring the flavor of Christ to the world around us.

NOTE: Paul compared our effect to the way it might affect the sense of smell.

2 Cor 2:15-16

For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. 16 To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life.

➤ **Salt Promotes Healing:** It works through osmosis – forcing liquid of the cells including those that may be bacterial.

APPLICATION: As the followers of Christ, we are meant to promote healing to those who are already condemned. Our inward character should be such that sin is not comfortable in our presence, and people are encouraged to come to Christ for healing.

➤ **Salt Prevents Decay:** It is used to preserve meat, as refrigeration was not an option for people of that time.

APPLICATION: As the followers of Christ, we are meant to prevent this present world from the rot and decay of sin. Our character ought to be such that sin and rebellion against God are subdued and suppressed.

NOTE: While we will not completely suppress the sinfulness of the world, we are still nonetheless here to prevent the decay of sin in society. We may not be doing a great job; but may we not lose our savor!

- A couple notable things to consider about salt is that it also produces thirst and was used in Roman times as payment! The life of a believer lived as Christ lays out may bring persecution from the world, but it is of great value as it produces a thirst in others for righteousness!

3. Radiate Light - READ 5:14-16

- Whereas salt deals with the inward character of His followers, light deals with the outward expression or display of His followers.

NOTE: Who we are inwardly is of great importance, but the followers of Jesus are not only called to a different character, but also a different conduct.

APPLICATION: It's quite an easy thing for us to imagine that as long as we are not making waves and retaining the inward character Jesus teaches here that it is enough. However, what we learn here is that Jesus wants us also to shine brightly in this world for Him!

- The problem isn't that we are not the light of the world, the problem is that we don't shine. This often is because we are not allowing our light to shine before men.

NOTE: Sometimes this is because we aren't doing good works, but other times it's because there is something hindering our light and keeping it from being seen.

- In the following Chapter, Jesus appears to say something that appears to be contradictory in nature.

Matt 6:3-4

But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

QUESTION: How can I shine so that men see my good works while at the same time do them in secret?

ANSWER: It comes down to motivation. What is the purpose behind your good works? Are you doing what you're doing to bring you the recognition of the world or glory to God? When we shine as we are meant to shine, our good works will bring glory to God!

- This world is a dark place, spiritually it is corrupted and in need of the preserving work of the church spiritually it is dark and it is in need of the illumination of God's word given to the church.

QUESTION: What does it look like to live as the light of the world?

Eph 5:8-14

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), 10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. 14

Therefore He says:

"Awake, you who sleep,

Arise from the dead,

And Christ will give you light."

- Paul' makes it clear that there are primarily two ways that the light of God's people affects the world around them.

➤ They expose sin.

➤ They reveal truth.

John 12:35-36

35 Then Jesus said to them, "A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. 36 While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them.

John 12:46

46 I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.

John 8:12

12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

- There are far too many Christians who are so desperate to be accepted by the world, that they have lost their savor and their light has been dimmed or covered. We have to recognize that following Jesus as He intends means that we are strangers and pilgrims, citizens of another kingdom here to pronounce the good news to those who still belong to this one!

1 Peter 2:11-12

11 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, 12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.