

## THE BLESSING WAY: OF THE PERSECUTED & THE PERSISTENT

**THESIS:** Let Us Bless

**TEXT:** Matthew 5:10-16

**OPEN:** In Biblical times Christians were ridiculed for their beliefs. Some called the gospel foolish, a scandal or insanity (*1 Cor 1:23; Acts 26:24*). Roman philosopher Celsus taught scoundrels frequently take advantage of the lack of education of gullible people and this happens among the Christians when they say “thy faith will save thee.” He further charged that “Christians convince only the foolish, dishonorable and stupid, slaves, women, and little children” (*Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, p. 478-479).

**Illustration:** Here’s a report on persecution of Christians today from *christianpersecution.com*: “While about 30 percent of the world’s population identifies as Christian, 80 percent of all acts of religious discrimination are directed at Christians (source: International Society for Human Rights)...Christians face persecution in more than 60 countries (source: U.S. State Department)...Millions of Christians face interrogation, arrest, torture, and/or death because of their religious convictions and cultural/ethnic identification (source: Open Doors USA)...Christians have been targeted for harassment in more countries than any other religious group (source: Pew Research)...Christian responses to persecution are almost always nonviolent and, with very few exceptions, do not involve acts of terrorism (source: Under Caesar’s Sword).”

In **Matthew 5:10-16** let’s discover the blessings from God for the way of the persecuted and the persistent of faith.

### LET’S BLESS AND BE BLESSED BY BEING PERSISTENT IN THE FAITH.

**Matthew 5:10-12a** “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. <sup>11</sup>Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in Heaven...”

**Persecuted** (Greek: *dioko*) means to press or pursue; metaphorically to hunt down like an animal. *Be persistent in the faith when persecuted because your reward in Heaven will be great.*

1. Faith persistence responds to persecution with godly words.
  - A. **Matthew 5:44-45** “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in Heaven. He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous.”
    1. When pressed or pursued by someone meaning you harm or a hard time—respond with godly words of prayer for them. This helps you avoid hating them and retaliating.
  - B. **1 Corinthians 4:12b-13** “When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly.”
    1. When pressed or pursued by someone meaning you harm or a hard time—respond with godly words of praise for them. This helps them accept grace and truth of Christ.
2. Faith persistence responds to persecution with godly works.
  - A. **Rom 12:17, 19-21** “Do not repay anyone evil for evil...Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is Mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head (and God will reward you’—Prov 25:22). Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

1. **Historical:** “Heap burning coals” may reflect an apology ritual, in which a guilty person, as a sign of their repentance, carried a basin of glowing coals on his or her head. The meaning would be that in returning evil with good you may cause them to repent or change (*Zondervan NIV Study Bible Notes*, p. 945, 995). In Biblical times, when someone needed to start a fire, it was customary to receive a few embers from neighbors. For an enemy, believers were to go way beyond the customary few and heap burning coals upon them as an act of grace perhaps winning them over.
- B. **1 Peter 3:9** “Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.”
  1. When pressed or pursued by someone meaning you harm or a hard time—respond with godly works of provision. It’s our calling from God—so we may inherit blessing.
    - a. **Called** (Greek: *kaleo*) means to summon suggesting vocation or destination.
- C. **Matthew 5:13-16** “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. <sup>14</sup>You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup>Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. <sup>16</sup>In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven.”
  1. **Insight from Craig L. Blomberg:** “Here Jesus proclaims precisely that Christians must permeate society as agents of redemption. Of the numerous things to which salt could refer in antiquity, its use as a preservative in food was probably its most basic function. Jesus thus calls His followers to arrest corruption and prevent moral decay in their world...Like lights from a city illuminating the dark countryside or a lamp inside a house providing light for all within it, Christians must let their good works shine before the rest of the world so that others may praise God...We are not called to control secular power structures; neither are we promised that we can Christianize the legislation and values of the world, but we must remain active preservative agents, indeed irritants, in calling the world to heed God’s standards. We dare not form isolated Christian enclaves to which the world pays no attention” (*The New American Commentary, Matthew*, p. 102-103).
  2. **Invitation:** Do you want a reason for why you were brought into this world by the Lord? If so, please sign-up at the Information Station to participate in our spiritual gifts (talents) discovery and deployment seminar with Jon Todd. It’s October 24th.

**CONCLUSION:** Let’s bless and be blessed by being persistent in the faith because our heavenly reward will be great. Here are some of the great rewards of Heaven:

**Matthew 25:34, 40** “The King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited Me in, I needed clothes and you clothed Me, I was sick and you looked after Me, I was in prison and you came to visit Me...I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.’”

**1 Corinthians 15:41-44** “The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.”

**Colossians 3:4** “When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”

\***Glory** (Greek: *doxa*) means brilliance, honor, or splendor.

**2 Peter 3:13** “In keeping with God’s promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.”

**Revelation 21:4b** “There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

*Insight from the Whole Bible Commentary:* “King David (*Psalms 73:1-14*) and prophet Jeremiah (*Jeremiah 12:1-4*) were perplexed at the wicked prospering and the godly suffering. But the Apostle Paul, by the light of the NT, makes this fact a matter of consolation. It is a proof of the future judgment, which will set right the anomalies of the present state, by rewarding the now suffering believer, and by punishing the persecutor. What the believer suffers unjustly at the hands of cruel men they receive grace, peace, and eternal reward at the hands of God” (p. 1341-1342).

**2 Corinthians 4:17-18** “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

**CLOSE:** Let’s bless and be blessed by the great reward in Heaven by being persistent in godly words and works.