

# Matthew

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- [ 0 : 00 ]     and be exceeding glad. For great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they, the prophets, which were before you.
- I did really question as to whether I would be able to bring this particular passage before you. For as you know, we live in a time and in a place where persecution is really very limited.
- In our land we have much which is called religious toleration. It does not really matter very much often whatever religion a person has.
- It is tolerated by the authorities and by many individuals. That has sometimes been the case in various parts of the world, in various times of history.
- So that we are not in immediate danger of the kind of persecution that these apostles soon had to face, which Jesus himself endured in such an intense degree.
- [ 1 : 35 ]     But still, for several reasons, I found that I must bring this subject before you. For one thing, it is an important part of the truth of God.
- And it is not for me to decide what I might think is suitable or not. This is part of the teaching of Jesus Christ here and elsewhere, that blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake.
- Nor is it possible for me to say that there is no one here to whom this word applies now. It is the truth of God. But then also, the disciples who heard these words were not being persecuted at that time.
- It was not so much a word for the present to them as for the future. They were not, as long as Jesus was with them, the particular object of the hatred of his enemies.
- But when he was taken away, they soon became the target of the persecution that was raised against his church.
- [ 3 : 04 ]     For them, it was really a question, blessed are ye, when men shall revile you and persecute you. That time would come and my dear friends, it may well come to some of us.
- I cannot possibly tell whether that will be the case or not. But there is surely no doubt that this kind of persecution is on the increase in the world.
- There are many parts of the world where intense persecution rages. And in the rapidly changing circumstances of our lives, we cannot possibly say that it will never be so here.
- This was a word of preparation for the future, a word to be remembered by the disciples, and a word for us to remember, lest there should be an occasion when we shall need so much grace to stand, and so much of the comfort which is expressed in the Saviour's own benediction upon the persecuted.
- Also, we may say that this applies very much to others who are persecuted in the earth.
- [ 4 : 48 ]     Jesus first says, Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Now, undoubtedly, there are many in this world who are suffering intensely for their faith.

In communist countries, in Arab lands, and also where Roman Catholicism is dominant, there are a great many who are in this case.

The Lord pronounces that they are blessed. And dear friends, those of us who do fear God, at least, should surely be deeply concerned for them, and should constantly pray that they may receive the comfort which is expressed in these verses, that they may know that they are indeed blessed, that they may be given that amazing grace that they so need to rejoice and be exceeding glad in the midst of such intense trials and afflictions.

The word says, Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. How we should pray for those who are in such a case as is expressed in these verses.

And further, although this persecution may not be very great in our experience, the Savior does not refer to any particular degree.

[ 6 : 36 ] We should, my dear friends, be very thankful that we are not exposed to these particular dangers and sufferings as so many are.

It is certainly no part for us to think, well, I'm not so persecuted as I ought to be. It is not for us in any way to invite or to provoke any antagonism against us, for that would not be suffering for righteousness sake at all.

But surely we all will experience in some measure the things that are expressed in these verses.

They that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. to some degree or other it will be so.

It may not mean physical pain. It may only mean, so to speak, the cold shoulder or ignoring us and wanting nothing to do with us or treating us with some contempt and scorn as being so different and having so little in common with those around us.

[ 8 : 02 ] but even so, there will be some measure of persecution felt by the godly. And if it is for righteousness sake, if it is for the name of Jesus, then the comfort and the blessing which he pronounces still applies.

No degree is mentioned here. so this is the final beatitude. In two ways in particular, it differs from the others.

It is extended. It is particularly emphasized here. The Savior goes on in these three verses to express this truth in more detail than any of the others.

because, partly because, no doubt, this is the result of the Christian character as it affects those outside.

As they persecute those whom the Lord does teach and love. this is something quite different from all the other expressions that we have here.

[ 9 : 24 ] As I've mentioned, the first three of these expressions refer to needs which are found by the teaching of the Spirit and the exercises of the soul concerning these things.

All who are taught of God are humbled. They are all mourners and they are all meek because the Holy Spirit in his teaching does produce these effects and makes these needs to be known.

Then after that, there is the hungering and thirsting which such must feel for better things and for the righteousness of Christ and for the holiness of heart that he alone can impart, that will surely be the result of this teaching.

They will hunger and thirst after righteousness. And then there are more, as I've mentioned, of the effects of these things in their disposition to be merciful and to be peacemakers, to be pure in heart.

For so far, it really has all been confined to the disciples themselves. But finally, there is this effect from outside the result of a Christian life.

[ 10 : 55 ] It is not light. It is despised by the world. It is hateful to the devil, and therefore it brings the subjects of it in some measure into the path of tribulation or of persecution.

So this is the final proof, in the way, of the Christian character. It does provoke an antagonistic effect, response from the world.

And then again, this is particularly personal. The Savior now says, blessed are ye, when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say, all manner of evil against you for my sake.

Great is your reward in heaven. Now he speaks, not so much in a general way, but in a personal way to those who are the particular and personal subjects or objects of this persecution.

persecution. It is for their personal comfort in such times of great need. As the Lord may help us, let us consider first the causes of this persecution, why it is that these things do happen, and then the character of it, as it is here expressed, and then the consolation that the Lord pronounces upon those who do thus suffer.

[ 12 : 44 ] First then, there are the causes. Why is it that this arises? Why do men so rise up and persecute the followers of Christ?

Well, we must really look at this from both sides. There is first of all the transformation of the believer. The faith in Jesus Christ has its effect.

The life which the Spirit imparts will produce a difference, a very definite difference. When Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, as we read in the gospel by John, there were those who were also born of his mother, who were his natural brethren, and they were speaking against him.

They said, why do you not show yourself to the people? And he said to them, the world cannot hate you. them. Now, it would be a sad thing if that were the case with any of us.

But his word was, now the world cannot hate you because there's no difference. There was no transformation of their character as yet.

[ 14 : 15 ] clearly, as we read in the Acts, later on there was a change in them as well, but at the time the world could not hate them because they really belonged to it.

There was no reason for them to be persecuted, as there was with him. He was so different. Dear friends, it is very evidently true that the more difference there is between you and the world, the more exposed you will be to persecution.

The more probable it is that you will have to suffer because of that difference. For it cannot really be hidden.

As long as you speak like the world and act like the world and live as they do, they do not mind. But as soon as you act in quite a different way and show that you are not going to live your life as they do and have an entirely different purpose in view, then they will begin to arise animosity and antagonism.

It may be quite falsely that they will think that you are pretending to be better than they are. But in any case, it reproves those who do not follow the teaching of Christ and hate all that concerns him.

[ 16 : 02 ] How intense the persecution was against Jesus and how did it arise? Sadly and solemnly it arose especially from the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the scribes and the priests, the religious experts, those who were so very religious and thought they were so good.

They were keepers of the law. they were observing the holy law of God as they thought. But here was one who was so different.

He was so holy, so good, that he exposed their lives. He made them realize the emptiness of their profession, the formality of that which they did, the lack of that essential principle of love to God in it all.

And so they found fault with him. They criticized all that he did. No, he went about doing good. It gave them no pleasure.

We read that Pilate, the Roman governor, knew that it was for envy, that they had delivered him to him. It was for envy, that very evil principle.

[ 17 : 37 ] They envied him, envied him because the people followed him, his popularity with the people, envied him because he showed the power of God which they so lacked.

And so they hated him. They could not bear to endure his presence amongst them. As we read in the passage in Acts, the apostles also came out for a personal attack.

It was not so much the believers who had been added to the Lord, but the leaders, the apostles themselves, who were boldly witnessing of a risen Jesus.

They were the ones who were singled out for persecution. And when the apostle Paul was converted, at once he became the particular object of the malice and spite of the Jews, how they sought to kill him.

As soon as he changed course and began to preach Christ in the synagogues, what intense opposition it raised.

[ 18 : 57 ] You see, dear friends, this is the first point that regards this, the transformation of character in the believer. It makes a difference.

They cannot any longer. They really cannot speak and act and follow the ways of the world. There will be a difference and some will resent it.

others. But secondly, the reason for this is the great wickedness of those that do not believe.

The depravity of the human heart is the other side of this, the other side of the cause for this persecution.

How very solemn it is. As we read in the Acts, those apostles, what were they doing? First of all, they were just preaching and teaching the people.

[ 19 : 58 ] They were testifying what even the leaders knew was perfectly true in their hearts, that Jesus was risen from the dead. And so they must put them in the common presence.

And then when they were miraculously released, and Peter told them the very truth, they were cut to the heart and considered how they could slay them, not that they had done any harm at all.

Again, it was a question of them speaking the truth openly and boldly and showing by their lives that they were different and the Sadducees, the Jewish council could not bear it.

And even when they were warned not to do anything to these things in that wise advice of Gamaliel, yet still they must beat them before they let them go.

And the apostles, perhaps conscious of the teaching of Jesus, no doubt they were. They departed rejoicing that they were worthy, counted worthy to bear shame for his name.

[ 21 : 12 ] But what a picture this gives us of the human heart, its resentment, its bitter reaction to that which is so good.

The evil that is found in our own hearts, the natural mind is enmity against God. It hates him, hates his son, hates those who follow his son, and are at all like him.

There is another reason also for this. Behind their malice is the evil one himself. Satan again and again has raised up persecution against the saints of God.

God. The intensity of the malice and bitterness that is often experienced by the saints of God in times of persecution cannot be just put down to the wickedness of man himself.

The devil all the time is at work raising these storms. We read in the revelation of how the dragon, the devil, poured out of his mouth a great flood to follow the woman, the church, in the hope of swallowing her up by that flood of persecution.

[ 22 : 48 ] So, as he so bitterly opposed the Lord himself, so he also raises. From time to time these attacks against those who love and follow the Saviour.

It is only to be expected that this will be the result. Jesus said to these very disciples later on, if they have persecuted me, they will persecute you also.

If they have kept my saying, they will keep yours. The servant is not greater than his master. Let us look also at the character of this persecution as it is mentioned here.

What does it entail? First, we must notice the particular reasons for it, as Jesus himself points them out here.

First, it is for righteousness sake. Not just blessed are they which are persecuted, but those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.

[ 24 : 05 ] Many fancy that they have been persecuted, but if it is on account of their own fault, then it is not included in this verse, and it is not included under the Saviour's blessing.

The Apostle Peter says, what glory is it, if when ye be buffeted for your thoughts, ye take it patiently.

That is really the least anyone can do, if it is his own fault that he is suffering anyway. But he said, if when ye do well, and suffer patiently, this is acceptable with God.

Jesus himself has teaching at this, to this end, at the end of the chapter concerning loving your enemies and blessing them which curse you.

He says, if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others?

[ 25 : 21 ] Do not even the publicans serve? That in this verse is doing more than others, more than others ever can.

Suffering, being persecuted, and suffering patiently for righteousness' sake. righteousness' sake.

Righteousness, of course, is that which is right in the sight of God, in accordance with his law, that which is acceptable and pleasing in his sight.

If you are suffering for righteousness' sake, if it is the result of doing what is right, what is according to the will of God, and on that account, you suffer for it, then Jesus says, you are blessed.

It is also in second place expressed in this way, Jesus says, for my sake, suffering, so to speak, in his stead, as followers of Christ.

[ 26 : 32 ] Christ. If the reason for the persecution is love to him, the faithful profession of his name, if it is the result of a personal union to the Savior, if it is the effect, the result of following him and living a life that does reflect something of his own character, something of his grace, something of his spirit, if it is for his sake, then the Savior says, such are blessed.

And this makes up for all the persecution that can possibly be endured. If the Savior pronounces that such are so blessed that they are favored and acceptable in the sight of God, that his love is so much toward them in their suffering, then this really should altogether counterbalance the effects of that suffering, that persecution.

Jesus does here express some of the particular things which may be expected. There is first the general statement of persecution.

They which are persecuted for righteousness sake. That word literally means pursued. It means that there is an intensity, a determination, a relentlessness about this.

Those who conduct this persecution are determined to inflict suffering on those that love the Lord.

- [ 28 : 36 ] The same word is used later of the Apostle Paul, that he persecuted the saints of God unto strange cities. He pursued them everywhere. He was determined to find as many as he could.

because of the intensity of his hatred against the church of God in his ignorance. So that is to be expected.

And also there are those particular expressions of this from the mouth. When men shall revile you, this means to censure, to criticize, to upbraid.

it means to rebuke in that way, to tell you how wrong you are, and how they did revile the Savior himself, even when they had got their way, even when he was hanging upon the cross.

He was reviled by those who passed by. They taunted him. If there'll be the Christ, come down from the cross.

- [ 29 : 53 ] The thieves who were crucified with him, both at first, reviled him. Though one was brought in such a wonderful way to repentance, but how the Savior himself was reviled, what vile things they said against him.

And whatever they may say against us, who are so guilty of so much, it can never approach the reviling that the Savior himself had to bear through his life and in his death.

For that was entirely false. He was entirely innocent. there was no reason whatever that he should be reviled. And then there is this word, persecute, again.

Much persecution can be delivered through the lips, through the things that are spoken in various ways. That also is often persecution.

The words of the evil, of evil men, are described as being like razors, or like arrows, even bitter words.

- [ 31 : 14 ] How they shoot, the psalmist says, against the perfect, and how they can wound when they are so false and unjust, and there is such bitterness expressed in them.

They shall persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely. Clearly this is a very extensive expression.

It really includes everything evil that can be said. It may be lying, it may be blasphemy, it may be taunting.

It's all manner of evil. Now what an exceedingly solemn matter this is, that those who persecute the church of God often really stop at nothing in the things that they say.

They say all manner of evil against the saints of God, but their words cannot really hurt them. They certainly may deeply wound them and distress them from the time being, but they can do them no permanent harm.

- [ 32 : 32 ] There is such a portion for them awaiting and this is all falsely. It is a false accusation. These things have no real support in facts.

They are lies or blasphemies or accusations or false witness which has no proper foundation in fact at all. These are the things that the saints of God have often been called upon to bear.

And of course it is by no means easy. If people say things about you that you know are perfectly untrue, they say them in a very bitter spirit, this is bound to distress you.

there is the consolation in the way that the Saviour so speaks to his disciples in these verses.

Twice he pronounces that these people are blessed. He says that theirs is the kingdom of heaven. This is the same word that we found at the beginning concerning the poor in spirit.

- [ 33 : 52 ] The same people, it is these humble followers of the lamb, especially who are persecuted. And theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

What matters if everything that they have upon earth is lost? They have no possessions here below. How little they have lost compared with this great gain.

Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. the apostle Paul could say, I have suffered for him, for Christ, I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but down, that I may win Christ and be found in him.

To have a portion in the kingdom of heaven is sufficient to make anyone forego any portion here below, which is just nothing in comparison with that.

And then there is also this counsel to rejoice. The Savior says to such who are truly suffering for his name's sake, for righteousness' sake, he says, now when you are in this condition, when you are found in this position, rejoice and be exceeding glad.

- [ 35 : 20 ] It is not by any means all sorrow here. There is that natural distress and the pain caused by suffering in these circumstances, but still the Lord says rejoice and be exceeding glad.

There are reasons why such should truly rejoice. One is that their reward is great in heaven.

Whatever earth may think upon them and the men of this world matters very little because they have such a great reward in heaven.

Everlasting life is before them. Endless bliss and peace is soon their portion. Do you know how that in this country where these things were so?

In the days of others, Tyndale and Wycliffe, in the days especially of Queen Mary, when hundreds of believers were burnt to the stake in this city and in other parts of the land, many of those, how they rejoiced.

- [ 36 : 38 ] They went to the stake singing praises to God. They continued to sing as long as they could in the flames that consumed their bodies. How they rejoiced, that they were so soon to enter into this reward.

The teaching of scripture does indicate, and I feel persuaded, that such who do suffer in this particular way have an especially great reward.

How soon their sufferings are turned into such ineffable bliss. How great the reward when the Savior receives such of his dear suffering saints into his presence.

There is surely a very special and exceeding great reward laid up for them. And further consolation is this, so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Now what an honor it is to follow in the steps of those truly great and godly men. Men like Isaiah, that noble gospel prophet, who is said to have been sawn in half by wicked king Manasseh.

- [ 38 : 12 ] And that wonderful man Jeremiah, who stood alone in all the sufferings of Jerusalem, who stood alone for God and contended for truth and for the name of his God, and so suffered being let down into the dungeon and so reviled of men.

What a wonderful character he was. And Daniel, who so suffered on account of his faith and the godliness that he could show, so that they gave up any hope of finding any fault in him except in his religion, we shall not find it, they say, apart from his service of his God.

Otherwise, they could not fault him at all. What a wonderful man. And Amos, who was so persecuted, and all the other prophets in their ways, some put to death.

death. What a noble role of honor there is concerning all such, and how they are included in those sufferings.

As the apostle says in the Hebrews, they were stoned. Women received their dead, raised to life again, and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

[ 39 : 57 ] And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonments. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with a sword, and so on.

They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy. Not worthy at all, but what worthy and honourable people they were who suffered, so willingly before the Lord's sake.

Now, dear friends, what an honour if we are called to follow in the same pathway, if we also are persecuted for righteousness sake, what cause there is to rejoice and be glad.

Followers of those who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises, following in the line of those great prophets of old, and of these dear disciples of the Lord himself, most of whom in their time did suffer death by martyrdom, and all of whom, doubtless, were severely persecuted for righteousness sake.

what an honour this is. And the Lord pronounces his blessing upon such. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[ 41 : 31 ] Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you, for my sake.

Now, again, my dear friends, this is no easy pathway. It is entirely contrary to that that the flesh would take.

How easy to give up. How easy to deny the faith. How easy just for a little while to be ashamed of the Lord Jesus.

How easy to take a way out. And yet, how much grace is needed to stand fast and to stand firm against all temptations.

To stand for what we know to be right, and to keep in view the wonderful example of the Savior. When he knew what he must pass through, he set his face as a flint to go up to Jerusalem.

[ 42 : 42 ] He would not be deterred from making that supreme sacrifice, from passing through agonies not only of body but also of soul, that he might lay down his life for his sheep.

And shall those that follow him not expect, not be prepared to endure a little suffering for his name's sake.

Now, dear friends, if we should, any of us, there may well be some occasion for this word for any of us, if we should have to pass this same pathway, though this word is to be remembered.

The Savior's gracious benediction, his rich blessing, rests upon such as it might be put. O the blessednesses of those that suffer persecution for righteousness sake, great is their reward in heaven.

Such have every cause to rejoice and to be exceeding glad, to look beyond the sufferings of this world and to say with the apostle, I reckon that the sufferings of this present world are not to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.

[ 44 : 10 ] What shall separate us, he says, from the love of Christ? Shall persecutions, or distress, or hunger, or nakedness, or famine, or sword? None of these things can separate us from that mighty, unchangeable love of the Lord Jesus Christ.



if we are but embraced by love like that, what a support it will be in the time of pain and persecution. Now the Lord bless his word to us.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.  
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. benegeneration Hymn number 717 to bliss 584.

See the suffering Church of Christ gathered from all quarters all contained in that red list but not murder and martyrs. Hymn number 717.

[ 45 : 36 ] May the martyr come to bliss come through thought and taste may we all with emptiness pray for faith and patience.

Sing us up in judgment right gather from the waters of the day in that wilderness while the martyrs lost us The early cross will make us fall in its sound condition Of the sick and of the home

Be the proof in station Of the mighty mountain dew Her all life will bring us This we safely may conclude All the wretched sinless All the lost and gave God's sight

Till the blood of Jesus Was the world of faith and white Now they sing His praises As you shall The Very■ of faith This we peripherally