

Living In the Kingdom, Part 4  
Matthew 5:10-12; Second Timothy 3:10-14

**Slide 1**

When it comes to our faith and especially when ministering in the name of Jesus, it still can make us cringe, if not bristle inside, when we hear others demand that we be more tolerant, sensitive, progressive, or inclusive.

The world is no different today than it has been for past societies, generations, or time eras in the history of humanity.

Solomon said it best in Ecclesiastes 1:9, *“What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.”*

When we witness and minister for Jesus to others in a loving, patient, and enduring way, it can be difficult, challenging, and even offensive.

1 Corinthians 1:18, *“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”*

Satan has engineered this world to exhaust itself trying to prevent the Gospel from reaching the lost.

Satan doesn't want the Gospel message to reach anyone, and he'll stop at nothing to keep the good news from spreading.

It's discouraging and even scary at times when we share our faith with others and they not only reject it, but threaten us, laugh at us, or even file charges against us.

The apprehension we feel of possibly inviting ridicule, rejection, or hostility can tempt us into believing that it's too high of a risk to share the Gospel if we're just going to end up hurt or injured.

That reality of such evil against us is the very reason we need to share the Gospel in the first place!

Helping those in darkness to see, understand, and come into the light of God's love through His Son, Jesus Christ, is why we endure the ugliness of persecution.

This is why today we're going to look at what Jesus said about persecution and what our response should be.

## **Slide 2**

In Matthew 5:10 Jesus said, *"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

Have you ever been persecuted or persecuted for righteousness? The term *"righteousness"* means *"the revealed will of God and man's willingness to obey it."*

When we're persecuted for righteousness, for trying to obey and activate the will of God in our lives, we've been promised the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus said that we'll be blessed when people revile, insult, or berate us falsely for His name's sake.

In each of the statements in Matthew 5:10-12, the focus of the blessing is our standing firm in our belief in Jesus and what He said, when people demean and talk about us for doing so.

Now, we all know that not every persecution we experience is because of our being righteous. A lot of our persecutions are because of something we've done that wasn't righteous at all.

You need to understand the difference. Persecution is persecution, but the reason for the persecution is the issue. To persecute someone means to torment, afflict, annoy, or physically hurt them.

There're many words or actions that can describe our persecuting someone including teasing someone to the extent it gets on their nerves and causes an offense.

In its truest definition, persecution isn't something that's done for fun or in love. Persecution is done, on purpose, with the intention of causing harm to the person who's subjected to it.

If we're being persecuted for something that we started or for something we did wrong, that's one thing. But when we stand up for righteousness and suffer persecution because of it, that's different.

Our being willing to be persecuted for righteousness conflicts with what the world believes. By the world's standard, we only have to be committed until the going gets tough.

There's a saying that applies to most Christians and it goes like this: *"When the going gets tough, the tough get going."*

Depending on how you read this statement, it could mean that the tough person flees when the going gets tough or you could read it as the tough person starts taking action when the going gets tough.

Based on your personal reaction, you can read this any way you choose, but if you're the one who flees when times get rough, then you exemplify the world's view.

In our world today, you don't get much credit for staying in the fight. When you look around, you'll find that when things get tough in a relationship, people leave.

When things get tough on the job, people leave. When things get tough in the Church, people leave.

When things get tough at any point and it looks like the ship going to sink, we jump ship. After all, we're not the captain who's supposed to go down with the ship.

This is what the world teaches. Some people believe that *"Life's too short to have to put up with some things."*

When I think that way, those things are generally things I don't want to deal with anyway, so I have an excuse to just walk away.

But we can't walk away from being righteous and defending it if we want to be blessed.

In this life there're some things that we'll experience that we'll need to deal with, especially when it comes to being persecuted for righteousness' sake.

It's expected that we'll suffer for standing for righteousness. Remember, those who're persecuted for righteousness' sake will inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Listen to what Paul told Timothy.

2 Timothy 3:10-14, *"You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ*

*Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it.”*

### **Slide 3**

There are a couple of things I want us to understand, as it pertains to being persecuted. Paul reminded Timothy of the persecutions that he had experienced in the cities where he preached about Jesus.

Then he told Timothy that those who desire to live a godly life will be persecuted just as he had suffered persecutions. You don't hear this taught in many churches today, but it comes with the Christian faith.

This persecution will come in many forms, from people talking about us because of our faith to people turning their backs on us for the same reason.

The day will come, and is already here in some areas, when it will be unpopular to be called a Christian in our country. However, the world hasn't changed much since Paul made this statement to Timothy.

One of the key points from these verses pertains to evil men. Paul states that evil men will continue to get worse. They'll continue to deceive others just like they're being deceived.

It's important for us to recognize that these evil men are truly being deceived by the great deceiver – Satan.

In some cases, they don't know that they're deceived. The truly “evil man” might not know that he's being deceived, but neither does he care.

In the 19th and 20th chapters of Revelation, John talks about the beast and Satan and how they're deceiving their followers.

Of course, we know Satan's end, but his followers will have the same end because they were deceived and refused to recognize truth.

Imagine being so deceived that you actually believe you're going to win a showdown with God! I read a story a few years ago about a minister who had a dream one night of going to hell.

I'm not sure if it was a dream or a vision, but it changed his life. In the dream he went to hell, and he vividly saw that there were different levels based on how sinful a person was.

In his dream he talked about being tormented day and night. He said he was in what looked like a jail cell and demons were outside the cell laughing and making fun of him.

He said the demons called him names, but that was not the worst of it. He stated that the demons said they had been deceived or tricked into following Satan but everyone else in hell had plenty of opportunities to be saved.

Everyone else had a chance, before they died, and didn't take it. Therefore, where the demons had been deceived, those going to hell without accepting Christ were just stupid.

What if it wasn't a dream but a vision? How would you like to endure that type of torment until the Day of Judgment and then be cast into the lake of fire for all of eternity?

Have you ever considered what eternity would be like? First, you must understand that everything here on earth is temporary. Love, hurt, joy, pain, physical and mental abuse, it's all temporary.

We have no concept of something lasting forever. But that's the case for all who live in God's kingdom and those who'll reside in Satan's kingdom. It's forever.

The difference is one's filled with peace and joy while the other's filled with torment and hatred.

As Christians, we must accept the fact that our world, not just America, is on a path of destruction. It's not going to get any better before Jesus returns.

Jesus said that it's going to get so bad in the last days that, *"...except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."* (Matthew 24:22)

In that verse, Jesus was talking about the days in which we're currently living. Things are going to continue to get worse and we must understand this fact.

When you read the book of Revelation, you see that the rise of the Beast and the Antichrist come on the scene based on the world's condition.

The Antichrist will be a world leader and deceive the world into believing he's the actual savior of the world while pointing people to worship the beast.

This is why it's so critical that we're actively witnessing to others about Jesus.

Our lives are not going to be easy as Christians and we need to recognize this. We must come to grips with it if we're to truly going to be Jesus' disciples.

#### **Slide 4**

#### Conclusion

Jesus closes out this part of His sermon with the following:

Matthew 5:11-12, *“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

In these two verses lies the reason we can walk with our heads held high, even though we might be walking through the valley of the shadow of death because of our desire to follow Christ.

We live in a cruel world where we'll be talked about daily because we're different from the world's standard.

We can't, as a disciple of Jesus, conform to this world because to do so means we must turn away from the righteousness to which we've been called.

In John 15:20, Jesus said, *“Remember the word that I said unto you, ‘The servant is not greater than his lord.’ If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also.”*

Someone said the definition of Christianity that fits most Christians is this: *“Christianity is like a guy telling a girl that he loves her. He wants to get as many benefits as he can without marrying her. As Christians we want everything the Bible promises to us, but we don't want to do what the Bible says we have to do to get the promises. We'd prefer a casual relationship rather than an intimate one defined as a lifetime commitment.”*

Does this sound like what we're seeing today as it relates to Christians making a commitment? If I'm not committed to the relationship, I'll take no pleasure in being talked about, mistreated, lied about, rebuked, scorned, or cheated.



If I'm not committed when things start to happen, my mind will shift to what's easier for me. I'll think that *"life's too short to deal with this stuff"* when I could have peace by simply walking away and enjoying my life.

But Jesus said that we should *"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way, they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*

Remember what I said earlier about eternity? It's something that we don't have a concept of here on earth.

Jesus told us to rejoice when we're mistreated for His name's sake because great will our reward be in heaven.

Let's say you turned your back on righteousness for ten million dollars and you enjoyed the money for thirty years before you died.

You had thirty years of a worry-free life as it pertained to money and being able to buy whatever you desired when you desired it.

You knew that one day you would die so you made sure you lived the best you could and got the most out of your money.

You lived to be a hundred and then you died. When you died, you went to hell. While in hell you were tormented because you walked away from righteousness for money.

Then you found yourself in God's presence, standing before a crowd of people too many to count, as the angel searched for your name in the Book of Life; not finding it, you were escorted to the Lake of Fire.

When you entered the Lake of Fire it was for all eternity. Not 30 years, not 100 years, but for eternity! This will be where you'll reside forever. This will never end. Can you see this?

But, if you accepted Christ and persevered through all the persecutions and torments for standing for righteousness, then you'll be rewarded and your reward will last, FOREVER!

Think about what the Bible says about rewards for those who're faithful and persevere:

1 Corinthians 15:58, *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, since you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."*

Galatians 6:9, *"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."*

James 1:12, *"Blessed is the man that endures temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love Him."*

Have you taken a stand for righteousness to the point that you're being persecuted for your stance? Are people talking about you because of your relationship with Christ? Are people withdrawing from you because you refuse to accept what the world tells you?

Are you known as a Christian who doesn't bend what the Bible says, or are you known as a Christian who believes in inclusiveness and Jesus will welcome everyone?

If you're not being talked about, mistreated, lied about, or cheated, or any of the other words that define a Christian who's being persecuted, ask yourself why not?

A Christian who's truly living in the kingdom here on earth will be persecuted for their stance at some point in their walk with Christ, because at some point you'll have to make a stand on something.