

No need to fear! God will be there!
Matthew 5:10-12

I. What is persecution?

- A. Persecute: "to afflict or harass, to oppress cruelly, to trouble."
 - 1. Greek means "to put to flight, or to pursue."
 - 2. Persecution is being troubled by people who oppose you.
- B. The beatitude speaks of persecution "for righteousness."
 - 1. So, this is opposition for beliefs and practices of faith.
 - (a) For having different values; not going along with culture.
 - (b) For example: Not swearing, abusing substances or having sexual relations outside of marriage.
 - (c) Because you are different you might be ridiculed and rejected.
 - 2. Persecution sometimes is a reaction to our beliefs.
 - (a) Christianity says that salvation is only through faith in Jesus.
 - (b) The Bible speaks to lifestyle issues such as sexuality.
 - (c) The world increasingly has values that are different.
 - (d) Different in terms of practices, preferences, protocols.
 - (e) Increasingly, Biblical views of sexuality and practice are attacked.
 - (f) If we hold traditional Biblical views, we are called bigots.
 - 3. Persecution can become prosecution when views are codified as law.
 - (a) It's not my purpose here to talk about specific issues.
 - (b) That's for another sermon.
 - (c) Today's passage tells us that persecution is a reality.
- C. Sometimes persecution begins at home (Matthew 10:32-39).
 - 1. Jesus said that prophets are opposed in their hometown.
 - (a) The people of Nazareth were offended; tried to kill Jesus.
 - 2. My Messianic Jewish friend attended her own funeral.
- D. If you are persecuted, make sure it's because of righteousness.
 - 1. Not self-righteousness.
 - (a) Remember, you are no better, just graced by God.
 - 2. Not condemnation.
 - (a) Why did the "sinners" like hanging out with Jesus?
 - (b) Because he was kind and caring, and probably fun.
 - (c) If he had been condemning he wouldn't have been accused of being "the friend of sinners."
 - (d) He is the friend of sinners. That is a badge of honor.
 - 3. Not because you force yourself on people.
 - (a) I once got fired for sharing the Gospel at work.

II. Everyone who follows Jesus will be persecuted.

- A. The blessing: "for theirs is the Kingdom of God."
 - 1. So, all who are "persecuted for righteousness" are believers.
 - 2. "No servant is greater than his master" (John 15:20).
 - 3. The context: we are not of this world (John 15:18-19).
 - 4. Why is he saying such discouraging things to them? (John 16:1).

- (a) "go astray": Greek is skandalon; "not be offended."
 - (b) What would cause them to be offended? Persecution (John 16:2-4).
- 5. Who would they possibly be offended by?
 - (a) Not by their persecutors.
 - (b) He warns them so they will not be offended by God.
 - 6. He is saying, "Expect to be persecuted."
 - (a) When you are persecuted don't be surprised.
 - (b) Don't think that following me will always be easy.
 - (c) If you do, you will question me and doubt when persecuted.
 - (d) You will say, I did not tell you the truth.
 - (e) You will be at risk of becoming offended and falling away.
- B. We need to be aware that we can take offense toward God
 - 1. Jesus offended his disciples (John 6:52-55, 60-61, 66-68).
 - (a) "Does this offend you?" (skandalon)
 - (b) Why are they offended? They don't understand.
 - 2. To John: "Blessed is the man who is not offended in me." (Matthew 11:6 KJV).
 - (a) The NIV translation is: "does not fall away."
 - (b) Why would they fall away? Because they're offended.
 - (c) Why would John be offended? Broken expectations.

III. Persecution will be increasing.

- A. As our culture moves away from God and Biblical values...
 - 1. In the age of toleration, Christianity will not be tolerated.
- B. Jesus prophesied persecution for the Church (Matthew 24:7-9).
 - 1. Many will turn away (Matthew 24:10).
 - (a) The Greek word for "turn away" is skandalon (Matthew 24:10 KJV).
 - 2. What will people in the church be offended by?
 - (a) Remember, Jesus said, "I'm warning you now so that you won't be offended."
 - (b) People who think Christianity is all about God blessing me.
 - (c) God giving me health and wealth, prosperity.
 - 3. All sorts of issues can cause offendedness.
 - (a) Politics
 - (b) How a pandemic is to be handled (by govt, by the church).
 - 4. Guard your heart against being offended!
- C. There is no need to fear persecution.
 - 1. God is in control.
 - (a) He will never leave nor forsake his people!
 - 2. When we are persecuted, he will be with us (Matt. 10:19-20).
 - 3. Do not be afraid! (Matthew 10:28-31).
 - (a) God is good! He is in control! He has us!
- D. Great will be the eternal reward for those who are persecuted!
 - 1. "Rejoice and be glad for great is your reward in heaven!"
- E. What do we do to be prepared?
 - 1. Draw near to Jesus now!
 - (a) Strengthen your faith by going deeper with God!