

## **Simply Unexpected – Week 5 – “Persecution? No Thank You!”**

### **Introduction**

Read Matthew 5:1-12. Our focus this week is on the last two Beatitudes, which declare those who are persecuted because of their faith in Jesus will receive a “great reward in heaven. The second of these two Beatitudes changes from the third person (“those”) to the second person (“you”), personalizing this Beatitude for us in ways that are both challenging and encouraging. One challenge is Jesus’ assertion that persecution is inevitable whenever we seek to live out our faith in full view of the world. The encouragement comes from Jesus’ declaration that while the pain of persecution is real, it is only temporary.

Jesus’ declaration that “those who are persecuted because of righteousness” are blessed presumes open engagement with society as a believer. The inevitability of persecution is conveyed by the assertion that you will be blessed “when” these things happen, not just “if” they happen. This counters the misguided belief in some Christian circles that following Jesus means a life of ease and comfort free from any struggle or difficulty.

Persecution takes many forms, some more subtle than others. Jesus and the first few generations of his followers experienced it in some of its more horrific forms and rejoiced in it. Christians were persecuted socially and economically whenever they sought to apply their beliefs to daily life. Ironically, they were persecuted by some (not all) Jews because of their beliefs about Jesus but also by some non-Jews because Christianity was commonly viewed a sect within Judaism.

The most common forms of persecution in western cultures are insults and ridicule, not imprisonment, torture, or death. There was a time in the recent past when our culture respected Christian belief and practice even if it did not agree with it. The so-called “Blue Laws” were an indication of this respect, but most of these laws are no longer observed or have been rescinded.

None of this should prevent us from putting God first at work, at home, or at school, especially when it is inconvenient. When we seek to live out our faith in full view of the world, we will experience opposition in some form. We should take this as an indication of our faithfulness and God’s blessing, not a reason to back down.

**This week:** The blessings of being persecuted for our faith.

<sup>10</sup>“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, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:10-12 NIV).

**Opening Discussion:**

1. Share one thing that you found helpful from Sunday’s message.
2. How would you define “persecution” based on the message?
3. In what ways, if any, are Christians persecuted in America?

**Study Time:**

1. **These Beatitudes pronounce a blessing on those who are persecuted, insulted, or maligned because of their faith in Jesus. There is a difference between being persecuted for one’s faith and just having a bad day. Our faith bears fruit in the world when we live out the practical implications of what we believe. This means, in part, actively seeking to “not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21 NIV).**

Jesus exhorted us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us and to do good to those who hate us (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27). This is countercultural in several ways. First, it counters prevailing societal expectations about how to treat those who have wronged us. Second, it can come across as a sign of weakness and an invitation to further persecution. Third, it presumes that suffering for our faith is inevitable when we live it out publicly.

- a. Persecution is inevitable for those who follow Jesus. Read **1 Peter 3:13-17** and reflect on what Peter teaches about how we should respond when we experience persecution. What are some reasons why it might be God’s will that we suffer or are persecuted for our faith (1 Peter 3:17).



- c.** Violent persecution of Christians is real. More than 340 million Christians in every part of the world experienced persecution in 2025. It is a capital offence to be a Christian in places like North Korea. Yet God is powerfully at work in those places. The witness of the early church shows as many, if not more, people coming to faith in Christ because of how believers met and responded to persecution than by the preaching of the Gospel. What are some godly ways that we might respond to worldly attempts to keep us from living out our faith in our society?
  
- d.** Spend the rest of your time discussing what it means for us to welcome any opposition to living out our faith instead of seeking to avoid it. How might our willingness to embrace Jesus' promise of true joy and peace in heaven impact our ability or willingness to do this?