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**A Disciple's Heart...Anticipates Persecution
Matthew 5:10-12**

Matthew 5:10 *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

This is the eighth distinguishing mark, or recognizable trait, of a true child of God. When a man has an undivided heart for God and his mission; it is only natural that he offers peace with God to everyone.

He wisely anticipates hostility because he was once lost, blind and running from God. He understands that unless the Holy Spirit opens a man's eyes, he will remain God's enemy. **A disciple's heart anticipates persecution.**

Remember how we said some weeks back that these 8 Beatitudes get progressively "harder?"

This is harder for us, in part, because we may not know what persecution really is:

It's not the uncomfortable fallout of our own bad decisions or behavior
It's not the pain of our unmet expectations or the result of our not getting our own way
It's not feeling like we're over-worked, underpaid or inconvenienced by someone else
It's not the perceived lack of opportunity, applause or affirmation
It's not even the ridicule we may get for something related to ourselves
...that may even be true

Too often, Christians are "persecuted" not for their Christianity, but for their lack of it. Incompetence mixed with false piety is sure to bring rejection. There is a reason the Church today is looked at as being insensitive and condemnatory

We need to read what follows to get a better understand what persecution really is:

Matthew 5:11-12 *Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Notice how the previous Beatitudes are addressed to the "third person," but this one is now addressed to the "second person," You?

This is now getting personal - because I don't like being falsely accused

Verse 10 tells us we are blessed when we are persecuted “for righteousness’ sake”

Verse 12 tells us that when we are persecuted, we are like the prophets

What did prophets do?

They called out the people for their sin

They called people to a peaceful relationship with God

And people didn’t want to hear either - so they shot the messenger

Matthew 21:33-41 *Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, They will respect my son. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance. And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants? They said to him, He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.*

Who is the master of the house? - God

What is the vineyard he made? - His chosen people and His Kingdom

Who are the servants he sent? - the prophets

Who is the son? - Jesus

What was the inheritance? - authority to determine what peace with God is

Who are the other tenants? - the church, His (new) chosen people

How do we know this?

Matthew 21:42-44 *Jesus said to them, Have you never read in the Scriptures: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.*

And what was their response - as the prior tenants? They wanted to kill him.

Matthew 21:45-46 *When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard this parable, they perceived that he was speaking about them. And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.*

They heard the truth of their broken, fractured relationship with God,
And they responded by persecuting the Prophet, the Messenger

Being poor in spirit runs counter to a prideful, unbelieving heart
A mourning, repentant heart is not appreciated by the world
A gentle, meek person is regarded as weak, because meekness is seen as
weakness by the world
Hungering and thirsting for spiritual things of God is foreign and repugnant to
A world that wants only what it can touch and taste
Merciful people make unmerciful people feel awkward and embarrassed
A pure, single-minded heart focused on God is in direct contrast to our impure,
self-focused culture
And a peace-maker doesn't settle for cheap or counterfeit peace at any price
Being a peacemaker is our mission

And all of this results in persecution!

In **John 15:18** we see Jesus shepherding his disciples hearts, as they anticipate persecution.

"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of this world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of this world, but I chose you out of this world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me."

Persecution is this: when we know that what we may suffer is really, ultimately directed toward Jesus.

Sad truth is, we don't really know persecution, because we're a whole lot like the world. They cannot really tell the difference in us.

Do you revile others? Do you persecute others? Do you utter all kinds of evil against someone else? Is someone else your piñata? Whose team are you on?

But the history of the Church, when the Church has been pure, when the Church has grown, is marked by rejection and persecution

Back in Matthew 5, Jesus tells us what our response is to be

Matthew 5:11-12 *Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account...Rejoice and be glad!*

Why? Because pain somehow feels "good?" No! Pain does not feel good.

Jesus tells us to rejoice and be glad, because:

We get the Kingdom of Heaven (v10) - we get citizenship

Our reward in Heaven is great (v11) - we get Jesus

We are in communion with the saints (the prophets) who went before us

We're in good company!

The word Jesus uses here for "reward" means "immeasurably great"
God will not permit what has been done for His glory to go unrewarded.

2 Timothy 4:6-8 *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*

What do you think it will be like for such saints the first thirty seconds in Heaven? The first half hour? The first day? The first 10,000 years?

It's okay to fear persecution. But as Christians we're called to expect it.

Back to an earlier question. What's the difference between a Christian and someone else?

- a broken humility before God
- see Jesus as King, not ourselves
- we have repented and believed
- our sins no longer define or identify us
- we know we have a great inheritance waiting for us

So How can we respond to persecution for Jesus' sake?

1. Keep your eyes on Jesus. He's been there
2. Keep your eyes on the reward. The Kingdom of Heaven is beyond this jacked up world. It is breaking through. It's here, but not yet fully here
3. Don't seek to avoid persecution. Are you taking in Jesus, but hiding Him in you? Know this, avoiding persecution for Jesus' sake means you are not cultivating or wanting to cultivate the previous 7 Beatitudes
4. Pray for God's help to navigate the persecution

Pray and confess your fears to God.

Ask the Holy Spirit for the courage to ask for a heart change. Ask Jesus to help your unbelief in this promise.

Thank Jesus that he suffered and died for your salvation. His blood now pumps through our veins.

Praise God that he has caused us to see our brokenness, to be humble before him, to see ourselves as reconciled in order to be reconcilers.

Praise Jesus because he rose from the dead and conquered Satan, sin and death.

Praise God for the gift of the Holy Spirit, who helps you in your weakness.

Praise God because one day when Jesus returns he will put a final end to his enemies and persecution will be no more.

Praise God because he has an immeasurably great inheritance waiting for us.

Pray that God will get the glory, and that you will get the grace needed

Pray for those that persecute you. Jesus did.

The Church is being persecuted throughout the world, just not in our immediate world. Pray that the Church, us included, will stand faithful.