



TRUTH IN LOVE

Shedding Light on the Word of God

Suffering for Eternity

Matthew 5:11-12

***¹¹Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you,
and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake.
¹²Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven,
for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.***

The Roman method of threshing grain consisted of one man stirring up the sheaves while another rides over them in a crude cart equipped with rollers instead of wheels. Sharp stones and rough bits of iron were attached to these cylinders to help separate the husks from the grain. This simple cart was called a tribulum—from which we get our word “tribulation.”

When great affliction comes to us, we often think of ourselves as being torn to pieces under the cruel pressures of adverse circumstances. Yet as no thresher ever yoked up his tribulum for the mere purpose of tearing up his sheaves but to disclose the precious grain, so our loving Savior never puts us under the pressure of sorrow and disappointment needlessly.

In times of suffering, it is always helpful to remember the statement of God in Isaiah 28:28: “Grain must be ground to make bread” (NIV). Suffering, though unpleasant at the time, accomplishes much good in the life of the faithful believer. This is what Jesus explains in Matthew 5:11-12. His eighth and final Beatitude (5:10-12) shows what the results will be of living by the other seven. Worldly fame, riches, glory and ease will not be one of the results. Rather, those who develop these “Beatitude attitudes” can expect only pain, suffering, persecution, slander, scorn, trials and tribulation in this world.

But Christ says that when these things happen to us, we are **blessed**. He says that when people think evil of us (**revile**), do evil to us (**persecute**) and **say all kinds of evil** things about us, we should **rejoice!** When was the last time you praised God for pain, especially when it is inflicted by somebody else?

Is Christ a masochist? No, He is not. We are to rejoice because there is much to gain from suffering. In 5:11-12, Christ provides three reasons why persecution is beneficial, and why we can rejoice in the face of suffering.

First, suffering for being a follower of Christ is a blessing because it is **for His sake**. This tells us first of all (as 5:10 brings out) that our pain should not be a result of being a pain to others (cf. 1 Pet 2:20; 3:17; 4:15-16). If you are rude and arrogant, the slander you receive is deserved. If you abuse and sin against others, the response you receive is discipline, not persecution. But when we suffer for righteousness sake, we are suffering for the sake of Christ. This enables us to become more like Christ (cf. Phil 3:10; 1 Pet 4:1), to have a special kind of fellowship with Christ (cf. 2 Cor 1:5; Phil 1:29) and to gain the glory of Christ (cf. Rom 8:17-18; Heb 2:9; 1 Pet 4:13).

Second, suffering grants **great...reward in heaven** (cf. Rom 8:17-18). It is as they say, “No pain, no gain.” All the Beatitudes incorporate an element of reward for those who follow them. And in fact, eternal reward is offered everywhere in Scripture as one of the proper motivations for faithful obedience to Christ and His commands (cf. 6:1-5; 10:41; 1 Cor 3:8-15; 2 Cor 5:10; 2 John 8; etc.). Although houses, cars, health, family, job, reputation and even your very life may be stripped from you here and now, nothing can destroy your treasure in heaven (Matt. 6:20). When we suffer for Christ’s sake, we are also suffering for eternal reward.

Third, suffering allows us to join the company of those Biblical heroes we so often esteem—**the prophets who were before you**. Jewish people then and now (as well as Christians) highly esteemed the prophets of the Old Testament (Jas 5:11). They were symbolic of how God uses people

who are fully devoted to Him. Yet in Christ's day, many Jews did not believe that prophets still existed.¹ They believed that God's use of prophets to proclaim His Word had ceased. So when Jesus compares His followers to prophets, this would have imparted to His followers a sense of awe that they had been chosen for such an extraordinary mission. Of course, suffering would come also, but that was a meritorious by-product of doing the work of a prophet.

And what was the work of a prophet? They boldly proclaimed the truth of God's Word to people who didn't want to hear it (Jer 5:10). The burden of proof was on those who gave the crowds what their itching ears wanted to hear (Jer 8:8-9).² But those who spoke the word of God, suffered for it (Jas 5:10).

The way Jesus concludes the Beatitudes is instructive. He doesn't hold back in either direction. In other words, He doesn't sugar-coat the truth about impending persecution, nor does He expect His followers to be happy about persecution because "That's what disciples do." Christ lays out the high cost, and incredible riches that are associated with being a disciple.

When you challenge other Christians to step up to the plate, be like Jesus. Tell them about the trials and troubles they may face, but also encourage them with the promise of great reward if they do. This is where the balance lies in the Beatitudes of Christ.

Family and Ministry Update

Our family is embarking upon another Texas summer and it's supposed to be a scorcher. The girls are preparing by soaking up as much sun as possible before it gets too hot. They love to play in our kiddie pool and sprinkler. They also enjoy watering all of the flowers and tomato plants, which is a big help for Wendy! Bugs are also a big part of Texas summers, and the girls are enjoying that part as well—for the most part. They chase *after* butterflies (Taylor got to hold one the other day!) and run *away* from bees and spiders. They also collect as many potato bugs as they can. So far, Taylor's record is fifteen at one time in her hand. Both Selah and Taylor love watching these bugs roll up into balls. We also feed the squirrels and birds and take walks to the local park to feed the ducks.

When it gets too hot to be outside, the girls come in and dance to music (both are quite the ballerinas). Taylor is on the graceful side while Selah is more of an acrobatic tumbler. Both are very beautiful.

Taylor continues to excel at art; her new talent is watercolor. Selah is starting to enjoy boardgames. Yet one thing remains constant throughout the day: books, books and more books—especially the Bible stories. Taylor already knows many of these stories by heart so that she can "read" them to Taylor and Kahlea.

As for Kahlea, she is coming out of her colic slowly but surely. We can already see such a sweet personality emerging. Her smile is brilliant and goes from head to toe. One of the neat results of her crying during the last few months has been watching Taylor and Selah become closer to each other and really loving each other a lot. We are blessed with three precious, healthy and sweet little girls.

Thank you all for your prayers regarding our family. God has answers them with abundant blessings.

Pray also for Jeremy as he will be preaching three times in June and three times in July. Watch the website, as these sermons will be posted after they are delivered.

¹ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 57.

² Ibid.