

# The Sermon on the Mount

DEVOTIONAL STUDIES FROM THE  
MEN'S MORNING FELLOWSHIP

Matthew 5:11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

Matthew 5:12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

By the end of the first century, Rome had expanded almost to the limits of the known world. The Caesars came to be deified as a means of maintaining unity among many diverse peoples. It became compulsory to give a verbal oath of allegiance to Caesar once a year. You would be given a certificate, called a *libellus*. After publicly proclaiming, "Caesar is Lord!," you were free to worship any other god or gods you chose.

Christians refused – for which they suffered confiscation of property, loss of work, imprisonment, and even death.

- being changed to bring change -

The second century Christian leader Tertullian was once approached by a man who said, "I have come to Christ, but I don't know what to do. I have a job that I don't think is consistent with what Scripture teaches. What can I do? I must live." To which Tertullian replied, "Must you?"

The word translated **persecute** and **persecuted** is derived from a word meaning to *harass*. It came to mean unjust treatment or physical abuse of many kinds.

We have rights under our laws that we can and should exercise if we are physically abused. It's OK for a Christian to take advantage of being a citizen of this great nation. Even if you do, then have a right

attitude. And don't demand your rights when wronged until you've sought the Lord. Ask Him what He would have you do.

**Revile** means *seriously insulting*. It is what we categorize as verbal abuse. A Christian can expect both physical and verbal abuse.

**But not just expect!** It is cause for rejoicing. Compare this to our modern attitude that verbal abuse of *any* kind is never to be tolerated.

**...And say all kinds of evil against you falsely....** This is verbal abuse that occurs behind your back.

Again I say that we have legal recourse... But first seek the Lord for His spiritual counsel. And, in any case, **rejoice and be exceedingly glad** if you are so treated. It literally means, *to jump for joy*.

Athletes jump for joy. What makes you jump for joy? The idea is that this is more than just an internal joy. It is expressive.

Note the qualifier for both physical and verbal abuse: It must be **for My sake**. It must be on account of your testimony of right-living that these abuses come – *not* because of your own faults and failings.

We looked at this last time, but to reiterate: Righteousness is confrontational by its very definition. If I am saved by grace through faith, then I am a Hell-doomed sinner apart from Jesus declaring me righteous. As I live for Him, I am declaring to others that they, too, are headed for Hell. To the extent that they understand, they may be offended and want to strike out.

**For My sake** also reminds us that there is a spiritual war going on. The real hatred and animosity is not against you; it is stirred-up by the devil against Jesus Christ. You are stuck in the middle.

If you are **persecuted**, you get double the blessing: Both verses ten and eleven say you will be **blessed!** We talked already about the three-fold blessings of the **kingdom of heaven**:

1. Now – spiritual blessings in heavenly places.
2. In the kingdom on earth – to rule with Jesus.

### 3. In eternity.

In addition, **great is your reward in Heaven**. Rewards are tough to talk about because we think of them in terms of competition. We're at the end of football season. There is only one national champion; only one Super Bowl champion. They are rewarded; others are not. They get parades while others watch. They are competitors who, compared to others, are simply better.

When you stand before Jesus, it will be alone. There is no comparing; no competing against others. For that reason alone, we must rethink our ideas about rewards.

But – since Scripture makes so much of them, it is not right to slight them in any way.

The rewards are a culmination of His work in and through your life. The more you are rewarded, the more glory it brings to the Lord before any who might be watching – like the Father and the angels. It is your chance to lavish gifts upon the Lord – gifts He gave you by grace.

**For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.** Think of this from a first century Jewish mindset. Prophets were the great men of their culture. They were the heroes; they were revered.

Let's make a comparison. President Ford was buried this week. Several times the news commentators remarked about the exclusive 'club' of former presidents. We do right to honor these men because of their office.

God's prophets were a super-exclusive club! To be mentioned in the same sentence with them was mind-blowing.

When you are physically and verbally abused for righteousness sake, you are in an exclusive and glorious club.