

## Blessed Are the Persecuted

### Matthew 5:1–12

#### Key Question:

If Jesus says the persecuted are blessed, do we believe Him—and are we willing to stand with those He calls blessed?

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#### I. Introduction: What Does It Mean to Be Blessed?

In a culture where blessing is often defined by comfort, success, or health, Jesus' words in Matthew 5 are disruptive:

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (v.10)

Let’s ask honestly:

- Do our ideas of blessing match Jesus’ definition?
- What if being blessed includes suffering, not escaping it?
- And what if Jesus calls us not only to accept that—but to stand with those living it?

**Read Matthew 5:1–12 aloud.**

Let’s pay close attention to verses 10–12. Jesus says the persecuted are *blessed*. The word here—**makarios** in Greek—appears more in this chapter than any other in the New Testament. This isn’t a throwaway comment; it’s central to how Jesus describes the values of His Kingdom.

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#### II. Is Religious Persecution Still Happening Today? (Matthew 5:10–12)

**Short answer: Yes.** And it’s more common than we might realize.

- **Over 70%** of the world lives in places where religious persecution occurs.
- **Christians** are the most persecuted faith community globally.
- On average, **20 people a day** are martyred for their faith.

Let me tell you one story:

In **northern Nigeria**, *Mary*, a teenage Christian girl, fled her village when **Boko Haram** attacked. Her family’s home and crops were burned. For months, they lived in a cave, surviving on foraged food. But Mary kept her faith. “Even if I die,” she said, “I want to die as a Christian.”

This is not a story from the past. It happened just last year.

Other examples include:

- **Iraqi and Syrian Christians** driven from their homes by ISIS.
- **Karen Christians in Myanmar**, targeted and forced into refugee camps.
- **Chinese house churches** being raided and pastors imprisoned.

Even in places like **Mexico**, **Russia**, and **India**, believers face harassment for not following the dominant faith or political ideology.

So, when Jesus speaks of persecution, He's not only describing His time—He's describing our time too.

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### III. Why Does Persecution Happen?

Jesus says, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted **for righteousness' sake**.*" That's important. He's not blessing suffering for any reason, but suffering that comes from following Him faithfully.

Persecution today happens for many reasons:

- **Government oppression** (China, North Korea, Iran)
- **Religious extremism** (ISIS, Boko Haram)
- **Mob violence** (as with Stephen in Acts 7)
- **Family pressure** or honor-based violence

The Greek word **diōkō** means "to pursue, harass, or oppress." It appears repeatedly in Matthew—5:10, 5:11, 5:12, 5:44, and 10:23. Jesus warns His followers that persecution is part of the journey. He doesn't hide it—He blesses it.

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### IV. Why Would Jesus Call the Persecuted Blessed?

Three reasons stand out:

1. **The Reason**

They're persecuted *for righteousness' sake*—for doing what's right, not for being argumentative or judgmental.

2. **The Range**

Jesus includes more than martyrdom:

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me." (v.11)

This means verbal abuse, exclusion, and slander are also persecution.

3. **The Reward**

“Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven.” (v.12)  
This is Kingdom-of-Heaven thinking. The reward isn’t just now—it’s eternal.

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## V. What Is Our Role? Are We Released from Responsibility?

Absolutely not.

In fact, **we are called to respond**—not just with concern, but with action. Consider the verse right before this:

“Blessed are the peacemakers...” (v.9)

Jesus moves from **peacemaking** to **persecution**. Why? Because real peacemaking often puts us in conflict with oppressive systems.

**Hebrews 13:3** commands us:

“Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners...”

This is as much a command as “make disciples.”

What would it look like if we really stood with the persecuted? If we let their struggle shape our priorities, our prayers, our generosity?

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## VI. Application: What Can We Do?

Here are **practical steps**:

1. **Pray** — It’s the #1 request from persecuted believers.
2. **Learn** — Sign up for alerts from [www.21Wilberforce.org](http://www.21Wilberforce.org) or [SpeakFreedomTexas.org](http://SpeakFreedomTexas.org).
3. **Give** — Even \$21/month can support work in hard places.
4. **Advocate** — Use social media or contact your representative (see [IRFscorecard.org](http://IRFscorecard.org)).
5. **Reach Out Locally** — Befriend refugees or invite someone of another faith into your home.
6. **Go** — If you’re able, join a mission trip to support churches in difficult areas.

Most of all, begin to **redefine blessing**—not by comfort, but by courage. Not by ease, but by obedience.

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## VII. Conclusion: Will We Align Our Lives with Jesus’ Words?

“Blessed are the persecuted, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”



That Kingdom isn't far off—it's breaking into our world now. And it calls us to be peacemakers, justice seekers, and comforters of the afflicted.

**Let us not admire the persecuted from afar. Let us stand with them.**

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**Closing Prayer:**

Lord, give us eyes to see those who suffer for Your name.  
Give us courage to align our lives with Your Kingdom.  
And give us love that moves beyond sympathy to action.  
Make us peacemakers in a world of pain.  
In Jesus' name, Amen.