



THE PRAYER CLOSET

ENCOURAGING & EQUIPPING BELIEVERS IN PRAYER

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BLESSED ARE THE PERSECUTED

God has given believers many promises in His Word. Believers are to accept, believe, and personally claim these promises. I see God's promises highlighted in Bibles, in paintings, in crocheted pieces on walls, and on the desks of believers. Yet, there is one promise I never hear anybody claiming or proclaiming. It is **2 Timothy 3:12**, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." This is a promise of God; yet, I don't hear many believers discussing this promise. Jesus assures us that a believer will face opposition in this world.

As we have looked at the beatitudes, we see that Jesus is full of surprises. We have learned to expect the unexpected from Jesus. He has already announced that the poor in spirit and those who mourn are blessed. Yet, He now declares that the persecuted are blessed! Talk about surprises. However, this is a part of following Jesus Christ. In this issue of The Prayer Closet, we will look at Jesus' last beatitude. We will examine the basics of persecution.

The Basic Truths Concerning Persecution

The first truth Jesus reveals about persecution is this: **Believers are persecuted for righteousness' sake.** Jesus' blessing is for those who suffer because they live a righteous life – a life striving to be like Jesus and to obey His commands. Nobody minds if you try to be a good person. Yet, when you confess Christ and seek to live for Him, that draws the persecution of the world.

It needs to be pointed out that we must be careful to examine ourselves at this point. I say this because of Peter's teaching in **1 Peter**. In that letter, he reveals that you can suffer either because you're a Christian (**1 Peter 4:16**) or because you do wrong (**1**

Peter 2:19-20, 4:15). We can experience mistreatment for the wrong reasons – being obnoxious,

sinful, belligerent, or self-righteous. You may take a beating not because of your Christianity but because of wrong, sinful behavior.

This verse challenges us to examine our lives. It forces us to ask some tough questions. Am I truly following Jesus Christ? Am I exhibiting the righteous life that Jesus calls me to? Is my faith in Jesus Christ evident to those around me? Jesus' words invite us to look at our lives and ask these tough questions.

Jesus is clear – persecution comes because of righteousness. His blessing rests on those who face it. He helps, encourages, and strengthens those who suffer for Him and the righteous life that He transforms us into. The one who has to deal with unjust harassment will experience that blessing and help of Jesus.

In **Matthew 5:10**, Jesus mentions persecution in general. Now, in **5:11**, He specifies the forms that this persecution will take, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake."

The second truth about persecution that Jesus gives us is: **As a follower of Him, we will have to deal with insults, intense pursuit, and slander.** The word "revile" means to heap insults on. People will speak unkind, disparaging words to you. They will "get in your face" with insults. The word "persecute" refers to an intense pursuit of a person. It has the idea of continuing to insult for the purpose of discouraging and destroying the faith and walk of a believer. Finally, Jesus says we will have to deal with slander, "shall say all manner of evil against you falsely." The word "revile" is more of a personal confrontation over your faith.

This last phrase means that people will spread unkind, disparaging words about you to others. Jesus says that these words will be "false" but that won't stop people from spreading the slander. It's a revelation of the fact that many people can't stomach Jesus or His righteousness, especially when it's displayed in His people on earth.

The third truth that Jesus gives about persecution is: **True believers can expect**

persecution personally. It's interesting that Jesus says in **5:10**, "Blessed are they (those) who are persecuted." Then in **5:11**, He declares, "Blessed are you." Do you see how Jesus personalizes it? Jesus moves from the general to the specific. Why does He do this? It's a reminder that every true believer will face persecution in his or her walk with Him. You will be insulted. You will have people who will attack what you believe and try to discourage or overthrow your faith. You will have people who will spread slander about you. It's not a matter of "if," it's a matter of when.

Jesus tells us this not to frighten us but to prepare us. In His love for us, He wants us to know that persecution will come. We are not to be taken by surprise or to shrink away from it. Jesus calls us to be prepared and not to be overcome by evil but to overcome evil with good (**Romans 12:21**).

Jesus shares a final truth with us about persecution in this text. It is: **Believers are to rejoice in the midst of persecution.** As I type these words, I'm rather overwhelmed by this. My heart says, "Really??? You want me to rejoice in the midst of insults, attack, and slander." Yet, Jesus goes on to say, "Rejoice and **be glad!**" How can I possibly do this? How can you do this?

In this text, Jesus offers four reasons why we can do this. First, Jesus will sustain you in the midst of it. He says, "**Blessed** are the persecuted." The word "blessed" refers to a supernatural, abundant joy. Jesus will grant this to the person who is persecuted. He will be with you. He will help you. He will empower you to stand firm. You can rejoice because of the joyful, sustaining power of Jesus.

Second, persecution is a testimony to the truth of your salvation. Jesus says of those who are persecuted that "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." When this happens to you, it's a sign that you are a member of God's kingdom. Your persecution reveals your citizenship. It manifests that heaven is your home and that you don't belong to this world. Bearing insults, attacks, and slander for the name of Jesus Christ means that you are genuinely a part of His kingdom (**1 Peter 4:14**).

Suffering persecution should not trouble you but encourage you. It is a triumphant sign that the kingdom of God belongs to you – that you are a member of God's kingdom. It surely seems to be a dreadful thing to suffer persecution for righteousness' sake. Yet, the words of Jesus here should provide you encouragement and consolation. Persecution means that you have certainly been rescued from the kingdom of Satan and

darkness and transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son Jesus (**Colossians 1:13**).

Another reason we can have joy is that we are in good company. Jesus declares, "for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (**5:12**). We rejoice because our persecution links us with the prophets who suffered the same thing. Israel was prone to rebellion and idolatry, the prophets often had to rebuke Israel. Because of this, they despised the Word of God and the prophets. The prophets suffered, but they engaged their age. Now, we must do the same. When persecution comes from this age, we are in good company.

The final reason that we can have joy in persecution is because of the reward that we will receive in heaven. Jesus declares, "for great is your reward in heaven" (**5:12**). God accepts you based solely on His grace through Jesus Christ. Yet, in His grace, He does bless our faithfulness. Jesus announces that the persecuted can expect a great reward in heaven. God chooses to give a gift to the persecuted for their suffering and the gift will be way out of proportion to what the believer suffered (**2 Corinthians 4:17**). Jesus is telling every believer, "In the end, in heaven, it will all be worth it!" Today's suffering is painful and harsh but it is nothing compared to the eternal glory that we will receive one day in heaven with our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ. You have a reward waiting in heaven that will far exceed anything that you suffer in this life.

Prayer And Persecution

In light of this passage, how can the believer pray? How can this text help us to pray? This text confronts us with the reality of persecution and the need to pray and prepare for it. How can you pray concerning persecution? The following are some prayer pointers that you might consider using as you pray for yourself, other believers, and churches:

- Pray that you will treasure Jesus Christ more than anything in this world (**Philippians 1:21; Acts 20:24**).
- Ask that God will grant you the power and help to live a righteous life before others; pray that the power and love of Jesus will shine through your life (**1 Peter 4:14-16**).
- In the midst of persecution, pray for God's wisdom, strength, and deliverance; ask Him to help you endure with faithfulness and determination (**2 Corinthians 1:7-9**).

- Plead that God will help you have the right priorities – that you will focus more on the eternal than on the here and now (**Romans 8:18**).
- Pray that your unshakable joy and faith will be a testimony to those who slander and insult you (**Acts 16:25; Philippians 1:27-28**).
- Ask that God would help you to powerfully present the gospel to others (**Colossians 4:2-4**).
- Pray that God will deliver and protect you according to His sovereign will (**Romans 15:30-31; Philemon 22**).
- Call on God to deliver you from fear but will instill in you a boldness to stand firm for Jesus Christ (**Acts 4:18-20; 30**).

Praying For Your Child In A Hostile World

As Christians, we live in a world that is opposed to our faith in Jesus Christ. For the Christian, it is hostile territory. It's one thing for you to face this hostility. However, what about your child? What about your children? I often have parents who express concern about their children and grandchildren. Our society is growing more antagonistic to Christianity. The coming generations of Christians will face greater, more intense persecution than the previous ones.

What can you do to prepare your children to face these challenging days? The primary way that you can prepare them is by prayer. The following is a prayer guide to assist you in praying for your child in a hostile world. You can use this or develop your own from it. The key issue is to intercede for your children – to prepare them to stand firm in the days ahead as we do in our generation.

Father, I plead that _____ will know Jesus Christ as his/her Lord and Savior and will have the assurance of his/her salvation (**John 3:16; 1 John 5:13**).

Father, I pray that _____ will love and treasure Jesus Christ above every earthly relationship and possession (**Psalms 42:1-2; Philippians 1:21**).

Lord God, I ask that _____ will love Your Word and will grow in his/her understanding of it and obedience to it (**Psalms 119:97; 1 Peter 2:1-2**).

Holy Father, teach _____ how to pray and depend on You. Help him/her to turn from his/her own strength and wisdom to Yours. Let him/her live a life of

prayerful dependence on You (**Matthew 7:7-11; Proverbs 3:5-5; 1 Thessalonians 5:17**).

Father, I pray in Jesus' name that You would deliver _____ from the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. I ask that _____ will be consumed with knowing and doing Your will. Save him/her from the love of this world and its temporary pleasures (**1 John 2:15-17**).

Father, I plead that _____ will love Your church and will seek the fellowship and help of other believers. I ask that he/she will develop deep and abiding relationships with godly, grounded believers (**Psalms 16:3; Galatians 6:2**).

Father, I ask that _____ will live a righteous life before others. I plead that You would work in him/her and manifest Your power and love to others through him/her (**Matthew 5:14-16**).

Father, I plead that _____ will walk and live in the hope that you give. Protect him/her from discouragement in his/her walk and witness (**Ephesians 1:18**).

Father, I ask You to strengthen _____ with Your might. Grant him/her the power that he/she needs to stand firm for You in this world (**Ephesians 3:16**).

Father, I ask that _____ will grasp the love that You have for him/her. Help _____ to rest in that love (**Ephesians 3:17**).

Father, I pray that _____ will have a deep understanding of the gospel and that he/she will be committed to sharing it (**Ephesians 6:19**).

Father, I pray that _____ will fearlessly tell others about Jesus Christ (**Ephesians 6:20**).

Blessing Your Enemies

In the face of persecution, Jesus calls us to bless our enemies (**Luke 6:28**). One of the best ways you can bless your enemies is by praying for them. Your enemies may be personal, national, or international. Regardless we are to pray for them. The following are some suggestions on how to pray for your enemies.

- Pray for deep conviction concerning their sin and spiritual need;

- Plead for the Holy Spirit to draw them to Jesus Christ in faith;
- Ask God to hinder them from carrying out their persecution;
- Call on God to open their eyes to their wickedness;
- Plead that God will help you not to be overcome by evil but to overcome evil with God;
- Pray that God will help you to be forgiving and compassionate toward them;
- Ask God to glorify Himself in your life and through the lives of your enemies.

The Prayer Closet News

We are still in the process of finishing our facility and getting ready to move into it. Thank you for your prayers and your donations. Please continue to pray for this ministry. We know that when we pray, God works. Pray that God will continue to work in and through this ministry. I would ask you to especially pray that lives will be transformed through this ministry. Please pray that we will grow in our impact in the lives of people for the glory of our God. At the same time, we ask you prayerfully to consider giving to this ministry. Your gifts will be used to make a difference in the lives of people across the world.

We are also highlighting one of our prayer rings in this issue. It is the “**Releasing God’s Power On The Streets**” prayer ring. This prayer ring is based on the Model Prayer of Jesus in **Matthew 6**. It is designed

to help you pray the petitions of the Model Prayer. It can be used in prayerwalking or in your daily prayer life. This prayer ring is \$2.00.

We would also like to announce a new product that has been produced. It is the “**Praying For My Church Devotional**.” This devotional contains a Scripture prayer for your church for each day of the year. It will aid you in praying God’s Word for your church. This devotional is \$8.00.

To receive either or both of these products, contact us at The Prayer Closet. We will send these out with an invoice that you can return at your convenience. On the other hand, you can use the Pay Pal option on our web site. Thank you for your prayers and continued support of this ministry. I pray God richly blesses you.

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