



EXPLORE THE BIBLE.

Acts 1 – 12 Sermon Series

Supports Session 5: Emboldened

Sermon Title: “Responding to Persecution” (Matthew 5:10-12)

Connection to Session 5

We learned in our groups this morning that Peter and John were emboldened to speak the truth of the crucified and risen Lord to the religious leaders of their time. When they did so, they experienced persecution. We will learn in today’s message that Jesus said that those who truly live the Christian life will experience persecution. This was fulfilled in Peter and John’s lives and it will be fulfilled in our lives too.

Introduction/Opening

Let’s begin today’s message with a question. How do we respond when we see a roadside caution sign telling us that danger is ahead? Some tend to ignore the sign, and this can be detrimental to the overall journey. Others can respond in total fear and stop the journey altogether. But the sign merely said “caution” and not stop. Others see the sign, acknowledge something unknown is ahead, and proceed with the caution needed. Jesus gave His followers a caution in His first recorded sermon. He told them that following Him will lead to persecution. Let’s study His warning and learn how it applies to us today.

Outline

- I. Caution: Persecution is ahead (v. 10).** Matthew 5–7, which is known as the Sermon on the Mount, is one of the first recorded sermons from Christ. He begins the sermon with what is known as the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes can be considered as a list of characteristics for those who strive to faithfully follow Jesus. Each Beatitude starts with the word “blessed” and then begins to describe the character trait of the one who is blessed. The word “blessed” in the original language means to experience and embrace joy outside of one’s personal circumstances. Therefore, one’s Christian journey is not based on how someone feels in a moment. Instead, the journey is based on the presence of God with us no matter the circumstances.

With this as background, we can learn from Jesus that those who are persecuted because of righteousness are blessed. It is important to point out that the righteousness is not self-righteousness. Righteousness is found in a growing and vibrant relationship with Jesus, and this will bring about persecution. Those who

follow Jesus should proceed with caution. But the caution sign is not a stop sign. We can proceed knowing that the kingdom of heaven ultimately lies ahead.

II. What the persecution will look like (v. 11). As we continue down this path with caution, it would be wise for us to know what lies ahead of us. Jesus clearly articulated that persecution lies ahead of His followers. He did not say, *if* we encounter persecution, but rather *when* we encounter persecution. While it is difficult for us to take solace in knowing that persecution is in front of us, as followers of Jesus we can find comfort in knowing that He is aware and will never leave us nor abandon us (Heb. 13:5).

The path ahead may include multiple forms of persecution. Jesus said that His followers are blessed when they are insulted. The persecution can take place behind someone's back. Once again, this message may be hard to hear, but it is still good to receive the warnings. We can proceed with caution and actively be on the lookout for what is ahead.

III. How to respond to the persecution (v. 12). Proceeding down a path with caution can yield several behavioral outcomes. Some people will instantly turn around. Some will see the danger ahead and be paralyzed with fear. Others will heed the warning and still journey through, knowing the outcome is worth it. Jesus instructed His followers exactly how to proceed. He wants us to rejoice and be glad.

In studying the Beatitudes, we will not find a single command until we reach verse 12. This is when Jesus said that His followers are to rejoice and be glad when we encounter persecution. Both commands are meant to be fulfilled in the immediate. Therefore, there should be no delay between a Christ follower experiencing persecution and that same follower rejoicing. Yes, this can be difficult because we do not enjoy the persecution. But we need not base our obedience on how we feel. Instead, we should strive to walk in obedience and trust God with the outcome. Why would anyone want to rejoice over being persecuted? "Because your reward is great in heaven" (v. 12).

Conclusion

As we learned this morning, Peter and John experienced persecution when taking a stand for Christ. We now see in the Beatitudes Jesus's warning of pending persecution. This was true for Peter and John, and it will be true for us today. But it will be worth it because our persecution today will yield a great reward throughout eternity.

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