

# INSIDE OUT

## *A Deeper Look at Jesus' Sermon on the Mount*

**BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED**

**SUNDAY, JULY 28, 2024**

**KEY SCRIPTURE** | Matthew 5:10–12

### **DISCUSSION GUIDE**

This week, we continue the series, "Inside Out: A Deeper Look at Jesus' Sermon on the Mount," in Matthew 5:10-12. Jesus speaks a difficult truth in His final beatitude to His followers—persecution awaits His followers. In verse 10, the persecution is because of "righteousness". In 11–12, it is "because of me." Jesus switches from the third person ("those") to the second person ("you") to apply force to this beatitude. Disciples of Jesus should expect to be insulted and slandered. It happened to Jesus and the prophets who came before Him, so it will happen to those who follow Jesus. Surprisingly, Jesus says our response to this should be rejoicing! We should be glad! This is so counter intuitive to us. How can the persecuted be blessed? Jesus says we should be glad because great is our reward in heaven. Earthly persecution produces a heavenly prize.

### **QUESTIONS**

Icebreaker: What is your favorite song and why do you love it so much?

1. Read Matthew 5:1–12 as a group. This is our last week in the Beatitudes. What has challenged you about reading these beatitudes? Was there one that stood out to you more than others?
2. Talk about your initial observations of Matthew 5:10–12. How do you feel about the idea of being persecuted (see Notes)?
3. Do you have any examples of people being persecuted today? Share them with the group.
4. According to 1 Peter 4:14–16, what does Peter say is a legitimate reason for being persecuted? What are illegitimate reasons for persecution?
5. Pastor Neal said persecution is (1) an indication we are doing something right, (2) an opportunity to develop spiritually, (3) often causes the Church to grow, and (4) will be rewarded (see Notes). Does this change your perspective on persecution? Have you seen evidence of any of these today?
6. Read 2 Corinthians 4:16–18 and summarize Paul's view of suffering and persecution. How do Paul's words challenge or help you?
7. How can we show support to Christians throughout the world who are being persecuted? What are practical things we can do?

## NOTES | Question 3—

There is no internationally agreed definition of persecution. Open Doors' methodology defines persecution as: **“Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians.”**

This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

- ◇ 1 in 7 Christians persecuted worldwide, 1 in 5 in Africa, 2 in 5 in Asia
- ◇ 2023: 4998 Christians MURDERED, another 4125 DETAINED, 14,766 churches and Christian properties attacked
- ◇ EVERY DAY: 14 Christians killed, 14 properties attacked, 12 Christians unjustly arrested or imprisoned, and another 5 are abducted.

This year the top 10 worst persecutors are relatively unchanged. After North Korea is Afghanistan, followed by Somalia, Libya, Pakistan, Eritrea, Yemen, Iran, Nigeria, and India.

Question 6— The following are the Scripture references for each point about persecution:

1. It’s an indication we are doing something right
  - 2 Timothy 3:10–12—But you, Timothy, certainly know what I teach, and how I live, and what my purpose in life is. You know my faith, my patience, my love, and my endurance.
  - 2 Corinthians 11:24–25—Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea.
  - 2 Timothy 3:10–12—Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.
  - John 15:18—“If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first.”
  - John 15:20—Do you remember what I told you? ‘A slave is not greater than the master.’ Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you.
2. It brings the opportunity for spiritual growth or strength.
  - Romans 5:3–4—We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.
  - 2 Corinthians 12:10—That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.
3. It causes Church growth
  - Philippians 1:12—And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News.
  - Philippians 1:13–14—For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God’s message without fear.
4. You receive heavenly blessings
  - Matthew 5:12—Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.
  - Hebrews 11: 24–26—By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.