

## Devotions with Matt

May 8, 2020

### THE PERSECUTED

During China's Boxer Rebellion of 1900, insurgents captured a mission station, blocked all the gates but one, and in front of that one gate placed a cross flat on the ground. Then the word was passed to those inside that any who trampled the cross underfoot would be permitted their freedom and life, but that any refusing would be shot. Terribly frightened, the first seven students trampled the cross under their feet and were allowed to go free. But the eighth student, a young girl, refused to commit the sacrilegious act. Kneeling beside the cross in prayer for strength, she arose and moved carefully around the cross, and went out to face the firing squad. Strengthened by her example, every one of the remaining ninety-two students followed her to the firing squad. Jesus, who never sinned, a bruised reed he never broke, a smoldering wick he never snuffed out, was persecuted, beaten and killed.



Jesus so loved the world that He was crucified for it. His Disciples who followed in His footsteps of love were also killed for their faith or sent into exile. The earliest Christians were tortured and killed by wild animals in Rome- all in front of crowd all too eager to see it happen. Recently, Boko Haram kidnapped and raped young Christian girls and made them swear allegiance to Allah. Al Shabab broke into a Christian school and killed a group of students during prayer. Isis beheaded twenty one Coptic Christians on an ocean shore. Churches are burned in Egypt, Niger and India. Christians are blamed around the world, beaten and their homes destroyed for not bowing the knee to anyone but Jesus. Persecution, suffering and death all came to them simply for the "crime" of accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior.

There are, according to researchers, over three hundred million Christians suffering persecution around the world today. In a recent article, Justin D. Long emphasized the startling fact that more people have died for their faith in the twentieth century than in all of the previous centuries combined. Here in America we may not experience persecution to the levels of many other countries, but you may, in some way, be persecuted for your faith, even now.

Jesus says in Matthew 5, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." He is saying we will be persecuted for our faith. In Second Timothy he tells us that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. To truly live a life for Christ we will meet opposition in some form. The question is not will we be persecuted, but rather how will we react to it when it happens?

Over and over again we see the same response we are to give when persecuted: Love. We are called to love our enemies and bless those who persecute us. Jesus says we are to rejoice when we are persecuted because great is our reward in heaven. He says when we are persecuted, we are blessed. The Scripture does not say to go out and be as obnoxious a Christian as possible so you are persecuted. It does not say to be judgmental, overbearing and hateful toward others to receive opposition. Jesus says it is in living a godly life,

following Jesus in the way of love, grace and truth toward others, we will find persecution. The right reason for persecution is for the world to see Jesus in us. If the world hates us for our love, remember it's because it hated Jesus first (John 15:18). Love for God and for others, our greatest calling and His greatest commandments, will attract many, but it will repel many as well. The love of Christ shines a great light into darkness, but there are those who love the darkness more- The Light is a threat to them- and so are all who love like Jesus loves.

Let us love as Jesus does, and when we are persecuted for it let's rejoice, because, like the Disciples and others before us, we have been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for Jesus. If you are persecuted in any way for loving Jesus and loving others you are on the right track. Love is the way of Jesus. In His kingdom there is faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love. Let's go into the world today and love. No matter what happens we will be blessed.

**But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:44-45**

In Christ,

Matt