

Day 46 Winning the War Within!

Matthew 5:10-11 (NCV) *They are blessed who are persecuted for doing good, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. 11 "People will insult you and hurt you. They will lie and say all kinds of evil things about you because you follow me. But when they do, you will be blessed.*

The Blessed life that Jesus is calling us to does not follow the path nor the methods of the world. **To receive what Jesus promised in His Sermon on the Mount, will require complete obedience. We have to do it the Jesus way. We have to follow the way of the cross.** We have to not only be willing to do it, we must actually live it out in our daily lives. Having a desire is good, but our desire must turn into action. Jesus knew full well that His audience would be reeling by the time He got through the first statements of His message. This profound new way of approaching a blessed life was a reality check for them, but it is also a jolt for us. **The beatitudes are a measuring line whereby we can evaluate to see where we are and where we still need to grow. Don't allow the places of your struggle to become the places that you settle for good enough.** Don't throw up your hands and say, "I tried, but God knows my heart." Because He knows our hearts, it is even more important that we apply all of these truths and build them consistently into our lives. Ask the Holy Spirit on a daily basis to give you the grace to live out the beatitudes and live in the power of your identity in Jesus.

The beatitudes are not for the faint of heart or for those who do not desire to grow to full maturity. Jesus has brought us through this journey to be ready for what the Father wants to do in and through our lives. He is calling us to lay down our lives and pick up our cross and follow Him. **"And unless you are willing to take up your cross and come with me, you are not fit to be my disciples." (Matthew 10:38 CEV)** **If we are unwilling to take up our cross, it is an indication that we are unwilling to follow Christ, and if we are unwilling to follow Jesus, we cannot possibly be His disciples.** No cross, no following and no fit! Before we can ever attempt to navigate the persecution we might face because we are following Jesus, we must first actually follow Jesus. To follow Jesus means we are willing to lay down our lives. Laying down our lives is not just being willing to die (I am not referring to physical death, although that might be required of some followers of Christ), what I am referring to is the willingness to do things God's way and the need to die to my way. **Selfishness has to die first before we can ever attempt to live a selfless life.**

If we are more interested in keeping our lives the way we want it and not wanting God to interfere, except for giving us a way to get to heaven when we die, then we are trying to save what we have, instead of giving it up for Him. You cannot save your life; you have to give it. **Jesus said, "If you try to save your life, you will lose it. But if you give it up for me, you will surely find it." (Matthew 10:39 CEV)** True life can only be found by our willingness to let go of what we think life is and follow what Jesus says true life is. **There is a great vulnerability in giving up what we know for that which we do not know.** The difference is, this is not something that a friend is trying to sell us on. This is God's invitation to a whole new way of living and a brand new way to approach life.

Because of this radical new life, we have a reluctance to follow. That's why Jesus gives us a clear process, not so that we can negotiate the terms, but that we can follow what He said and did. **The process is already set, the end result has already been determined, and the challenges have been laid out. The only person that can stop you, is you. Jesus is getting us ready to die, but some of us are clinging so hard to that which is, that we cannot walk in the power of what could be.** If we are not rooted in God's way of doing things, then when persecution comes because of God's Word, we fall and we do not last. **"The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with**

joy. 21 But since they don't have deep roots, they don't last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God's word." (Matthew 13:20-21 NLT)

Why is it that we believe ourselves more than we believe Jesus? Why are we more apt to do what we tell ourselves than obeying what Jesus told us to do? Who should you trust more, yourself or Jesus? Jesus knows we are vulnerable, but He has given us Himself so that we can trust Him and do the same. Our identity should be completely in Him. We died with Him in baptism and we now live through the Spirit in Him. That is why we can reflect and show His goodness to others. ***"But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy. 11 Dear friends, I warn you as 'temporary residents and foreigners' to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls." (1 Peter 2:4-25 NLT)***

We have to win the war within so that we can completely identify with Christ. By identifying with Jesus, we live in the light and He uses our lives to show others how good He is. That produces a response when others receive Christ, or a reaction when they reject Christ and reject us because we follow Christ. The world will keep pulling on us until we are willing to die to the world and live out our new found identity. ***"Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. 2 Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. 3 For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory." (Colossians 3:1-4 NLT)***

Before we get consumed with thoughts of being persecuted, we have to be filled with the realities of our new life in Jesus. **Don't be worried or afraid of persecution, rather fear God and make sure that your mind is set on things that will last for all eternity, instead of consumed with things that will give you a few years of fleshly bliss here on the earth.** When our lives are completely hidden in Christ, we display Jesus and not ourselves. Persecution cannot affect dead people, and we died to this life. **You cannot offend a dead person. You cannot hurt a dead person. You cannot mock a dead person. Dead people don't fight back or attack; they are dead.** In Jesus our old lives have died and the life we now live is His. So, when we are being persecuted, they are not persecuting us, they are, in fact, attacking Jesus within us.

So make the decision to follow Jesus. Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him completely; let His Word dwell in you richly and display His glory. Your old life is gone; your new life has begun! **Win the war within and you will find that there is nothing that anyone or any evil can do to you that will lead you off the path that Jesus laid out for you.**

Whoever wins the battle on the inside will be the victor on the outside. Have you died yet? Because in dying, we win, in losing, we gain, and in surrendering, we are victorious...

Reflection and Prayer:

- Take a moment and pray through today's list. (Source: opendoorsusa.org)

13 - SUDAN: In September 2020, Sudan abolished 30 years of Islamic law.

- **SOURCE OF PERSECUTION - Islamic oppression**
- **LEADER - Lieutenant-General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan**
- **TOTAL POPULATION - 43,541,000**

- **CHRISTIAN POPULATION - 1,970,000 (4.5%)**
- **MAIN RELIGION - Islam**

WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN SUDAN?

Although Sudan has taken significant steps towards religious freedom in the past year, Christians from a Muslim background still face extreme persecution from their families and communities. While they no longer face the death penalty for leaving Islam, they may be attacked, ostracized or otherwise discriminated against if their faith is discovered. Believers still keep their faith secret, for the safety of them and their family.

PRAYER POINTS:

- Praise God for these steps towards religious freedom in Sudan, answering years of desperate prayers by Sudanese believers and many others. Ask God that those in power would continue to make strides in this direction.
- Pray for protection for Sudanese Christians from a Muslim background—that they would be able to withstand opposition from their families and communities.
- Pray that Christian women in Sudan would be protected from sexual violence.

14 - SAUDI ARABIA: The small number of Saudi Christians has been slowly increasing, as believers take great risks to share their faith.

- **SOURCE OF PERSECUTION - Islamic oppression**
- **LEADER - King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud**
- **TOTAL POPULATION - 34,710,000**
- **CHRISTIAN POPULATION - 1,200,000 (3.5%)**
- **MAIN RELIGION - Islam**

WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN SAUDI ARABIA?

The majority of Christians in Saudi Arabia are expatriates with most coming from low/middle income countries in Asia and Africa. The few Saudi Christians from a Muslim background face the greatest pressure, especially from their families. Expatriate Muslims converting to the Christian faith also face strong persecution, likely similar to the levels they would experience in their home country. Whether Saudi or otherwise, most converts are forced to practice their faith in secrecy.

PRAYER POINTS:

- Pray that the Lord will continue to use the Internet to strengthen and unite believers, and grow the Saudi church.
- Pray that the Lord will reveal Himself to both Christians and non-Christians in dreams and visions.
- Pray for the protection of all Christians in Saudi Arabia, and for them to be given continued wisdom and discernment as they seek to follow and share Jesus.

15 - MALDIVES: In this beautiful island nation, Christian persecution takes place away from the eyes of international tourists.

- **SOURCE OF PERSECUTION - Islamic oppression**
- **LEADER - President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih**
- **TOTAL POPULATION - 459,000**
- **CHRISTIAN POPULATION - A small number**

- **MAIN RELIGION - Islam**

WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN THE MALDIVES?

While many see the Maldives as a luxury holiday destination, behind the beauty of this island paradise lies a strict Islamic regime. This chain of nearly 1,200 islands has one of the highest population densities worldwide, especially on its main island, Malé. The close-knit, homogeneous communities keep a close watch on their members for any sign of deviation—which naturally includes religious choice. Conversion to Christianity can easily result in a report to Muslim authorities.

PRAYER POINTS:

- Pray for opportunities for believers to gather safely.
- Pray that God will use the Bible to powerfully strengthen, encourage and nurture the lives of believers.
- Pray that attitudes among government officials, especially President Solih, will soften towards Christians and other religious minorities.
- Pray for the Christians among expatriate migrant workers, that they can be strong witnesses of the hope they have in Christ.

16 - EGYPT: In Egypt, kidnappings and forced marriages of Christian women and girls to their Muslim abductors has reached record levels.

- **SOURCE OF PERSECUTION - Dictatorial paranoia**
- **LEADER - President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi**
- **TOTAL POPULATION - 102,941,000**
- **CHRISTIAN POPULATION - 16,250,000 (15.8%)**
- **MAIN RELIGION - Islam**

WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN EGYPT?

Persecution against Christians in Egypt happens mostly at the community level and most frequently in Upper Egypt. Incidents may vary from Christian women being harassed on the street, to Christian communities being driven out of their homes by extremist mobs. Although Egypt's government speaks positively about the country's Christian community, the lack of serious law enforcement and the unwillingness of local authorities to protect Christians leave believers vulnerable to attack.

PRAYER POINTS:

- Pray for the safety of all Christians as they go about their daily lives.
- Pray for an end to false accusations and senseless attacks against Christians, and that there will be an urgency in local police forces to seek justice for all wrongdoing.
- Pray for boldness and discernment for Christians in Egypt, as they seek ways to shine the light of Christ brightly in their communities.

39 - BRUNEI - In Brunei, leaving Islam for another religion is illegal—so converts from Islam who follow Jesus encounter significant persecution from both local and national sources. Converts can be disowned by their families, and be forced to divorce their spouse and to leave the family home. Married converts to Christianity from Islam also lose custody of their children. Additionally, every level of society in Brunei is affected by the continuing introduction of Shariah law.

40 - DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC of the CONGO - The Islamic extremist group Alliance for Democratic Forces (ADF) is responsible for the persecution of Christians in the eastern part of the country, attacking

Christians and churches. The violence has resulted in more than a million internally displaced people. Additionally, followers of Jesus are at risk for kidnappings and having their homes destroyed. Converts, both from Islam and from tribal religions, also face pressure to take part in non-Christian religious activities and ceremonies.

41 - KAZAKHSTAN - Persecution in Kazakhstan hasn't changed much over the years. Legislation dating back to September 2011 restricts the ability to worship freely. Kazakhstan's government has steadily increased its control over religious expression in the country, which means increased surveillance, raids on church meetings, and arrests. Kazakh Christians from a Muslim background bear the worst persecution at the hands of the state and from family, friends and community.