

Day 49 Fight on Wise!

Matthew 5:10-12 (NIV) *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

It is easy to start feeling pressure when we talk about persecution and suffering. Jesus said, "Rejoice and be glad, because the persecuted rewards are secured!" It is very easy to become spiritually short-sighted and lack the ability to look towards what God has for us instead of what is right before us. When persecution comes our way, we say, "Why me? Why this? Why do I have to go through this? Why are they doing this to me?" We have to be careful, because it is very easy to be drawn into a wrong response. A wrong response for us would be to start seeing people as our enemy instead of as an opportunity to show the love and light of Christ.

A wrong response will not produce what God desires. The difference between a right and wrong response always can be traced back to what our hearts are rooted in. If our hearts are rooted in fear, we will respond the wrong way. If it is rooted in love, we will respond the right way, God's way. Jesus clearly told us that we don't have to fear anyone except God. People can hurt and harm us physically, but they cannot harm our souls. ***"Don't be afraid of anyone! Everything that is hidden will be found out, and every secret will be known. 28 Don't be afraid of people. They can kill you, but they cannot harm your soul. Instead, you should fear God who can destroy both your body and your soul in hell. 29 Aren't two sparrows sold for only a penny? But your Father knows when any one of them falls to the ground. 30 Even the hairs on your head are counted. 31 So don't be afraid! You are worth much more than many sparrows. 32 If you tell others that you belong to me, I will tell my Father in heaven that you are my followers. 33 But if you reject me, I will tell my Father in heaven that you don't belong to me."*** (Matthew 10:26-33 CEV) Our value has already been determined and paid for by what Jesus did for us, so we can be completely set free from the fear of man. If we suffer unjustly, God will one day reveal it to all. Nothing will stay hidden; everything that was done in the darkness will be revealed by God's light. Even though it might seem that people got away with acts of wrong or injustice, it will be revealed. There is no such thing as a secret in the presence of God.

So, Jesus tells us to confess freely that we belong to Him while we are in this life, so that He can confess before the Father that we belong to Him. This will give us the confidence to face any challenge or adversity the right way. Our future is secured, our eternity is settled, our rewards are safe; what can man do to us? Our Heavenly Father wants us to recognize who the true enemy is, and to adjust our warfare accordingly. If we see human beings as the enemy, we will be fighting with the wrong kind of weapons and that will guarantee that neither them nor us will be victorious. It is very easy to get caught up in a rhetoric of us versus them, a mindset of: "those people are the problem" and completely miss the opportunity that we have to reach people for Christ.

When we are afraid, we try to make ourselves look stronger and more intimidating. We mentally do what they tell us to do when you run into a bear in the woods: "Make yourself bigger and make loud noises," trying to show size and strength perhaps the bear gets spooked and runs off. We hear people in church circles say, "We have to be lions. We must roar. We must push back. We must take a stand. We are lions." Please hear me, we cannot win a spiritual battle with fleshly means. This is not a carnal battle; this is a spiritual one! ***"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. 4 For the***

weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5 NKJV)

We have to decide how we are going to fight our battles. Are we lions? Are we lambs? Who is our true enemy? **We say, “Let’s attack the culture.” Jesus says, “Live out Kingdom culture.”** Behind every obstinate, hard-hearted person, behind every deceiving person, behind every criminal minded person, behind every evil minded person, is the true enemy.

We cannot emotionally bomb people in the name of righteousness and say we are fighting God’s war. **People do cause destruction, but they are influenced. Attack people and you will find no possibility of change. Attack the influence and things have a great potential to change.** Both those who serve God and those who don’t have the same enemy. The devil hates human beings because they are made in the image of God. He is a sleuth and works nefariously underground. The way the enemy works is for us to see his influence in people’s lives, but then we are mostly more drawn to the person that commits the offense than the one who influenced them to commit the offense. **He draws us very unsuspectingly into combat that gives him the upper hand. By playing into his hands we find ourselves locked up, bound up and not even knowing it.** We get angry and bitter at one another, and that is where he thrives. Bitterness, hatred, anger, animosity is a prison he wants to keep us locked up in. When we bite and devour one another, he smiles and says, “Lock em’ up.” When we shout justice and condemn each other and think we are free, but we are like a bunch of prisoners locked up, yelling insults at one another. All in the name of “We are right and they are wrong.”

So how do we combat this enemy? We fight on our knees. There is a great temptation to fight in other ways. But Jesus fought in the garden of Gethsemane until the blood poured from His pores. When last have we had a battle like that on our knees? When last did we pray for an enemy’s salvation like that? When last did we rebuke the devil’s influence over those who persecute us? ***“For our fight is not against any physical enemy: it is against organisations and powers that are spiritual. We are up against the unseen power that controls this dark world, and spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil.” (Ephesians 6:12 PHILLIPS)***

Sadly, that is not the way many of us fight. **We fight through accusation and insults; we not only fight the culture, we fight one another.** We sow division and choose one over another. We are carnally minded and fleshly driven. We are immature babies that insist on having it our way. Yet, we claim we love Jesus. **All the while, the true enemy is hiding in his bunker called “deception” and thriving on pitting us against one another.** There is not one reference about Jesus calling us “lions”; He called us “lambs.” There is not one instance where any of the writers of the New Testament calls us “lions,” but they do call our enemy “roaming like a lion, with the intent to devour.”

You see, lambs might get killed. That is true. Our culture is dog eat dog, Jesus said; wolves in fact, they will tear lambs apart. No doubt. They might eat us for breakfast. But you see, dying is not the issue for us; we are called to die. **We die daily by taking up our cross. We die daily by laying down our lives for others. We die daily to the allures and attractions of the flesh. We died with Christ in baptism and were raised to a new life in Him. We are dead already.** But what if our persecutors, these haters of anything good and anything Godly, what if they kill us? Then we willingly lay down our lives. They might have lamb for breakfast, but it will be the sweetest meat they ever tasted because it is filled with love for those who hate us. You see, we do not hate people; we know who the true enemy is and we know where he hides and we know how to fight him. **If we die, then our lives are a sweet smelling aroma in the**

nostrils of our Father. Because if our lives must be poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of our faith for others, then so be it!

We do not cling to a life we have already relinquished. We do not hold onto a life that we have already laid down. In dying, we step through the door to the life that has been prepared for us before the foundations of the world.

The weapons we fight him with are not carnal, but they are mighty in God. We do not fight people; we fight the one who holds all people captive. We enforce the enemy's defeat, and we announce the goodness of Jesus and proclaim the Kingdom of God! Just like Paul, we have made the decision that the greatest value of our lives is to finish the work that was assigned to us by the Lord Jesus. We are here to do a job, and we will not allow the enemy to sidetrack us into the wrong kind of warfare, even when we experience suffering at the hands of people with evil intent. ***"And now I am bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. I don't know what awaits me, 23 except that the Holy Spirit tells me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead. 24 But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God."* (Acts 20:22-24 NLT)**

Just like Jesus we might have to suffer. You cannot share in Jesus' glory without sharing in His suffering. But the suffering will never come close to the glory that is to come. It will make the present suffering not just worth it, but insignificant compared to what the Father will reveal to us! ***"For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. 17 And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. 18 Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later."* (Romans 8:16-18 NLT)**

So we refuse to be intimidated in any way. We don't become like the world to reach the world. We become like Jesus to show the world the Father's love, even if they reject it. Suffering is a privilege: ***"Don't be intimidated in any way by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed, but that you are going to be saved, even by God himself. 29 For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him."* (Philippians 1:28-29 NLT)**

We fight the true enemy. We fight on our knees in prayer. We trust our lives in our Father's care. We live for Christ, and to die for Christ is the greatest privilege. We are the Body of Christ; we do what the Head tells us to do. When reviled and mocked, we bless. When ridiculed and accused, we forgive. When suffering, we pray. We have laid down our napkin expecting to be served, and we have picked up our apron and basin, serving the deserved and the undeserved. We are our Father's children and we follow our Lord's example.

We fight with wisdom, and we battle in prayer so that we can display our Father's love to the world. Fight on wise!

Reflection and Prayer:

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

25 - TURKEY: In Turkey, one's religious affiliation is recorded on the electronic chip of identity cards, making it easy to discriminate against Christians.

- **SOURCE OF PERSECUTION** - Islamic oppression
- **LEADER** - President Recep Tayyip Erdogan
- **TOTAL POPULATION** - 83,836,000
- **CHRISTIAN POPULATION** - 171,000 (0.2%)
- **MAIN RELIGION** - Islam

WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN TURKEY?

In Turkey, religious nationalism is very strong and is growing, placing enormous pressure on Christians. In contrast with previous years, the government has not only targeted foreign Christians, but has also deported foreign Christians who are married to Turkish citizens—and who have children who are Turkish citizens. While converting to Christianity from Islam is not illegal, converts will likely face opposition and pressure from their family and the local community—sometimes leading to divorce or disinheritance.

PRAYER POINTS:

- Pray that the stifling and suspicious atmosphere for Christians in Turkey will change.
- Pray that foreign Christians will be granted favor in their residency applications and in ongoing appeals against residency bans.
- Pray that all converts will stand firm in their faith, grow in their love for Jesus, and be guarded from all harm.
- Pray for church leaders as they face increasing pressure in a society that's growing increasingly hostile to Christians.

26 - TUNISIA: Violent Islamic extremists are active in the border areas in southern Tunisia—they will target any Christian.

- **SOURCE OF PERSECUTION** - Islamic oppression
- **LEADER** - Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi
- **TOTAL POPULATION** - 11,903,000
- **CHRISTIAN POPULATION** - 23,100 (0.2%)
- **MAIN RELIGION** - Islam

WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN TUNISIA?

The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level. Although every aspect of life for a believer involves very high levels of pressure, persecution is highest in family and church life. This is particularly apparent for those Christians who have converted from Islam, because often their new faith is opposed—sometimes violently—by both family and community. Additionally, it is difficult, if not impossible, for converts from Islam to live out their faith openly.

PRAYER POINTS:

- There are many lonely believers in Tunisia. Pray for them to find other believers around them to connect with, and pray for strong and fruitful fellowships.
- Please pray that the light, peace and love of Christ would overcome a spirit of intimidation and fear that some Tunisian believers are feeling.
- Pray for female believers in Tunisia struggling with trauma. Pray for God to bless them.

27 - MOROCCO: A handful of Christian men in Morocco were reportedly arrested because they had a Bible in their possession.

- **SOURCE OF PERSECUTION** - Islamic oppression
- **LEADER** - King Mohammed VI
- **TOTAL POPULATION** - 37,071,000
- **CHRISTIAN POPULATION** - 31,500 (0.1%)
- **MAIN RELIGION** - Islam

WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN MOROCCO?

The average pressure on Christians in Morocco remains high. And for converts from Islam, the pressure is even higher. They can lose their inheritance rights, or even custody of their children. Converts face opposition from family members, who do not want them to practice their new faith publicly. Particularly in rural areas, these followers of Jesus also face significant hostility from their local community and government. It is also a criminal act to “shake the faith of a Muslim.”

PRAYER POINTS:

- Pray for unity in the Moroccan church. Believers are scattered around the country and don’t know each other well.
- Pray for children in local schools. Islam is taught in many different subjects at school. Christian children say this is confusing, as they hear different teaching at home.
- Pray for Christian converts from Islam in Morocco. Pray they will be protected from harm or discrimination from their families.

28 - MALI: There was a coup in Mali in late summer 2020, leaving the door open for extremist elements to take root.

- **SOURCE OF PERSECUTION** - Islamic oppression
- **LEADER** - Interim President Bah Ndaw
- **TOTAL POPULATION** - 20,284,000
- **CHRISTIAN POPULATION** - 467,000 (2.3%)
- **MAIN RELIGION** - Islam

WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN MALI?

When Islamic extremist groups took control of the northern part of the country in 2012, churches were burned down and Christians were forced to flee. The displacement that happened still affects Christians. Although some Christians have returned, they still live under the threat of attack by Islamic militants. If conversion from Islam to Christianity is discovered, Christians risk violence and pressure from their relatives and family. Even in the south of the country, where Christians enjoy more religious freedom, threats from Islamic extremist groups have increased.

PRAYER POINTS:

- Pray for Christians still trying to rebuild their homes, churches and lives after being forced to flee in 2012.
- Pray for the interim government that took over the country in mid-2020. Pray the new leaders will fight for and advocate for religious freedom for people of all faiths.
- Pray for the Islamic extremist groups targeting Christians in Mali. Pray God will soften their hearts.

29 - QATAR: Qatar has a massive population of migrant workers—a recent estimate indicates only 12 percent of the population are indigenous Qataris.

- **SOURCE OF PERSECUTION** - Clan oppression
- **LEADER** - Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani
- **TOTAL POPULATION** - 2,792,000
- **CHRISTIAN POPULATION** - 367,000 (2.3%)
- **MAIN RELIGION** - Islam

WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN QATAR?

Life for Christians in Qatar can look very different depending on what type of Christian you are. There are two general categories: Christian foreigners, most of whom are migrant workers, and Christians who have converted from Islam. Foreign workers who are Christians are much freer to worship. Muslims who convert to Christianity face much more significant persecution. Converts from both indigenous and migrant backgrounds bear the brunt of persecution, and Qatari converts face very high pressure from their Muslim families.

PRAYER POINTS:

- Pray God works powerfully in Qatar. Ask that God's people will be brought into contact with those willing to hear the gospel.
- Pray migrant workers are protected from the abuse and discrimination of their employers and not additionally targeted for their faith in Jesus.
- Pray for secret Christians in Qatar who have accepted Jesus but cannot be open about their new faith.

30 - COLOMBIA - In Colombia, a largely Christian country, persecution is localized—and violent. Church leaders are threatened, harassed, extorted and even murdered as a result of the violence perpetrated by guerrillas and other criminal groups, especially in the country's more remote areas. In indigenous communities, significant opposition and persecution exists toward Christian missionaries and indigenous converts. In addition, there seems to be an increasing intolerance for Christians in the public sphere and an emphasis on secularism over pluralism.

31 - BANGLADESH - Christians were left out of COVID-19 government relief in Bangladesh, often facing starvation or severe health issues.

Bangladeshi society is growing increasingly Islamic, with the government doing more to appease concerns from Muslim extremists. Evangelistic churches—many of them Pentecostal—that work among the Muslim majority face the most persecution, but even historical churches are increasingly faced with attacks and death threats. Converts from a Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or an ethnic/ tribal background suffer the most. They often gather in small house churches or secret groups due to fear of attack.