“Handling Harassment for Your Faith”, Don't Worry - Be Happy! 8 of 8, Oct. 27, 2013 at SBC

 Matthew 5:10-12

One of the major causes, of unhappiness, is trying to be like everybody else, . . . and, trying to have everybody, . . . like you. There is a myth, that says, "In order to be happy, . . . I must be approved, by everybody",

 . . . but, that, doesn't work, does it? You just can't, . . . please everybody.

Jesus was a realist, and was very honest, about the consequences, of following Him. He said, If you follow Me, there are many people, who aren't going to, approve of your decision, . . they're not, going to like it. If you live by these beatitudes, we've been looking at, for eight weeks, . . . you can expect some people, to be upset.

So, in His closing statement, of Matthew 5:10 – *"Happy are those, who are persecuted, because they do, what God requires; the Kingdom of Heaven, belongs to them!"* The statement, was so shocking, He repeats it, twice.

Again, in the next verses, *"Happy are you, when people insult you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil, against you, falsely. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward, in Heaven, . . . for so persecuted they the prophets, which were before you."*

Jesus gives more space, to this one beatitude, . . . than, any of the other ones. And, He personalizes it. This is the only beatitude, that says, . . "you." Now all the other beatitudes, deal with **the character, of the Christian**.

This one, He just sums it up, and deals with **the character, of the world**, . . . and, how it treats, . . the Christian, who has the first seven characteristics, . . . in his or her life. He's saying, happy, and healthy, are those,

 . . . who can handle, . . . rejection. He's saying happy, and healthy, are those whose beliefs, . . . are so strong, . . . that, they can withstand, . . . any attack.

\*\* First, I want us to notice, **the reality, of harassment**. It's going, . . . to happen. Notice, in v.11, He doesn't say, . . . if you're persecuted, . . . if you're insulted, . . . but, *". . . when, . . . you're persecuted".*

Be prepared. Don't be caught, off guard. As the world gets more and more secular, it's getting more and more hostile, to Christianity. He doesn't say, if you're harassed, He says *"when, you're harassed."* That's, the reality.

\*\* What are **the reasons, for harassment**. The second part, of v. 11, *"because, you are, My followers."* He's not talking about, being put down, for being obnoxious. Sometimes, people set themselves up, . . . as martyrs. They are irritating, stubborn, they're nosey, and no wonder, people put them down. They are just, . . obnoxious.

Also, He's not talking here, about the self righteous Christian, . . . who is offensive in witnessing, . . . and, blows everybody away -- "Turn or burn, you're going to die, and fry. I'm so great, and you're so bad, . . . and, God's called me, to tell you, all your sins." And, then, the guy comes back, and says, . . . "I'm being persecuted." He's not being persecuted, . . . he's being a jerk! And, he's being, . . . a fanatic!

The right reason, . . . for harassment, is found, in John 15:20, *"No servant, is greater than, his master. If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also."*  Jesus is saying, the reason, for harassment, is being . . like Jesus.

Evil people, don't like Jesus. They don't like to attack Jesus, directly, . . . so, they attack, . . . His followers. The media, is merciless, on Christians – putting them down, and attacking them. The world, crucified Jesus. And, the world, would still do it, again, . . . today.

People become, uncomfortable, . . . around goodness. They didn't, like Jesus. They didn't like Him, . . because, the more light, that's in your life, . . . the more, it reveals, . . . the darkness, in other people's lives.

**Law of life:** The more positive you are, the more the negative people, are going to hate you. 2 Timothy 3:12 – *"Everyone who wants to live a godly life, in Christ Jesus, will be persecuted."* It doesn't say "he might be", . . . it says, . . . "he will be".

If you want persecution, and you're a student, go to any high school campus, and say, "I'm a Christian, and I'm committed to being a virgin, . . . until, I get married", . . . and, see what they say about that, . . . and, see if they don't laugh at you. Or, be a businessman, and say, "I'm not going to participate in that activity, . . . because, I'm trying to please the Lord", . . . and, see what they, say about that.

The world, cannot stand anybody, who is different. And, Jesus, . . . didn't fit, . . the mold. He wouldn't do, what the Pharisees, wanted Him to do. He wouldn't, . . . compromise. He wouldn't mold, and conform. They had to, either, follow Him, . . . or, kill Him. So, . . . they killed Him.

Someone might say, "I don't need, this message. Nobody ever hassles me, about living, for Christ." That tells us, . . that, they're no different, . . than anybody else. He says all, who live godly, . . . will be persecuted, harassed. If you're not being harassed, it means, . . . there is no difference, in your life.

**\*\*\*\* My Response, . . . to Harassment.** (4 things)

 How do you handle harassment, . . . when you're going to be persecuted, . . . for your faith?

**1. Recognize, . . . the source**. Ephesians 6:12 – *"We are not fighting, against human beings, . . . but, against wicked, spiritual forces..."* God is the enemy, of the devil. If you're a parent, I can hurt you, . . . but, the better way, to hurt you, . . . is to hurt your kids. If I hurt your kids, . . . that, really hurts you.

The devil, cannot get at God, . . . so, he does the next, best thing -- he hurts, . . . His kids. The Bible says, in Revelations 12:10 – *"Satan, is the accuser, of the brethren."* The person at work, . . who's harassing you, . . . is not, the real problem. Recognize, . . . the source. It’s the enemy!

**2. Refuse, . . . to retaliate**. Romans 12:17, 19 – *"If someone does evil to you, don't pay him back, with evil, . . . Never take revenge, . . . let God's wrath, do it."* Remember who, . . . the enemy is. The person attacking you, . . . is really, just a pawn. They don't understand, . . . that, they are being used, . . . by the devil.

Jesus, in v. 11, lists three different kinds, of verbal harassment. He says, there are **insults** -- when people try to dishonor you, or discredit you, . . . or, say derogatory things, about you. There is **persecution** -- mistreatment. Then, He says, . . . they will, **tell lies** – deceit, and deception.

The world loves, to find fault, with Christians. If a pastor stole some money, or ran off with some other man's wife, would it be in the news, in the morning? If the bartender down the street did it, would it be in the news?

The world loves, to find fault, . . . with believers. If they can't find, any fault -- if you walk blamelessly, . . with integrity -- they'll just, make something up. They will, insult you. They will, mistreat you. And, they'll make up lies, about you. They are going to, . . . attack Christians.

In the Bible, Jesus was accused, . . of being a drunk. They said, He's a glutton, and a wine bibber. That means, He was, . . . a party animal! But, Jesus never, . . . reviled back. He refused, . . . to retaliate.

**3. Respond, . . . positively**. Romans 12:21 – *"Do not be overcome, by evil, . . . but, overcome evil, with good."*  Is that your normal reaction, . . . when you're put down? You never get ahead, . . . by trying to get even. If you're always, trying to get even, . . . you never, . . . get ahead.

When I was a child, I teased my sister, mercilessly. I learned a secret, that once she started reacting to me, . . . I was in control. That's true, with any situation. Once you start reacting, . . who's in control? The person, who is taking, . . . the initiative. So, how do you respond, . . . positively?

Matthew 5:44 – *"Love your enemies, . . . and, pray for those, who persecute you."*  Is that, easy? No. Unusual? Yes. Is that what God says, to do? Yes. He says, "Don't react; respond positively." When people put you down, . . . you build them up. When people hassle you, . . . you just, be nice to them. You don’t, retaliate. The moment, you start retaliating, . . . they, are in control.

One of the greatest principles of life, that you need to learn is, . . . you have control, . . . of your reaction. You cannot, control the things, that happen to you, . . . you cannot, control the things, . . . that, people say about you. You cannot, control the events, the persecutions, . . . the hassles you'll get.

But, you can control, . . how you choose, . . . to react. You can control, how you choose, to respond. Respond, . . . positively. Love them. Pray for them. Pray for, their good. Pray for God's will, in their lives.

**4. Rejoice, . . . over it**. V. 12 – *"Blessed are you, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil, against you, falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad."* He's not saying, rejoice, in the pain. He says, when people put you down, for your faith -- not because, you're obnoxious, or being pushy,

. . . but, because, you're being, like Jesus, which means, you'll be different -- He says, don't complain, celebrate.

**\*\*\*\*\* Why should you, . . . rejoice?** (5 things)

**1) It means, that God's Spirit, . . . can be seen, . . . in my life.** If it couldn't be seen, in your life, . . . nobody, would be harassing you. It's an indication, that people can see Jesus, in your life. I Peter 4:14 – *"If you are insulted, because of Christ, you are blessed, . . . for God's Spirit, rests on you."*

When people put you down, because you're a Christian, it means they see Jesus, in you, . . . God's Spirit, in you. If I'm not being persecuted, I ought to ask, . . "Can anybody tell? What's wrong, with me? Can anybody tell, . . . that, I'm a believer?" The world, did not, love Jesus. He was perfect.

Nobody, can stand, perfect people. It shows, how imperfect, all the rest of us are. Have you ever had someone walk into a dark room, that you are sitting in, and they turn on the light, and you jump back from it? Jesus was the light, of the world. John says, *"Men loved darkness, rather than the light, . . because, their deeds, are evil."*

It means, God's Spirit, can be seen, in my life. If you're insulted, because of Christ, . . . you're blessed, because, God's Spirit, . . . rests on you. Today, we have too many, . . . undercover Christians. Like secret agent, Christians. Undercover, . . . believers. You don't know, . . . if they are really believers, or not.

They may say it, and show up at church. They may have churchianity, . . but, do they have, Christianity? They may have a religion, but do they have a relationship? It's like the people, who go around saying, "My witness, is my life." Be serious! What an, egotistical statement! "I'm so much like Jesus, I can walk into a room, . . . and, people will automatically, fall down, and repent!" Even Jesus, had to tell them.

You may walk around, and be real nice, . . and, people will just think, you're a boy scout! A nice, moral person. You've got to, tell them. We need audio-visual Christians, who walk the walk, and talk the talk. You've got to, tell them, . . . and, you've got to, show them. (Don’s just sing it, . . . bring it!)

What if they outlawed Christianity, . . . would there be enough evidence, . . . to convict you? If you were to be, put on trial, for being a Christian, could they prove it? Or, would it just be, . . . circumstantial evidence?

**2) It means God, . . . can trust me.** The Bible teaches, . . . that, when you are being persecuted, harassed, . . . it means that, . . . God can trust you with it. Acts 5:41 – *"The apostles were so full of joy, that God considered them worthy, to suffer disgrace, for Jesus' name."* Circle "considered them, . . worthy".

We Christians, in America, know so little, about persecution. We have it, so easy. Yet, around the world, . . . thousands of Christians, . . . are martyred, every day. We don't live, . . . in that, kind of world.

But, are we, blessed? The Bible says, that they were considered worthy, . . . to suffer disgrace. If you've read anything, about the church in Russia, you'll know that the Christians there, pray for the Christians, in America. They say, that the persecution, . . . has made them, stronger believers.

Christianity, is like a nail, the harder you drive it, the deeper it goes into the wood. There's tremendous growth, in Korea, right now. The largest churches, are in Korea. The Korean church, was built on the blood, of martyrs. When the Communists invaded, one of the stories was, . . . that the pastor, and his family, were taken.

The Communists dug a big hole in the ground, put the husband, his wife and three kids, in the hole. They then brought, the whole city, around. They said, "Now pastor, renounce your faith, . . or, we're going to bury you, your wife, and kids, alive." His kids started crying, grabbing his legs, "Daddy, don't let us, . . die!"

 He was getting ready, to renounce his faith, and his wife, put her hand, over his mouth, and wouldn't let him speak, and told the kids, to be quiet, . . . "We get to die, . . . for the glory, of God."

Is that, . . so bad? Are you, going to die? Yes. Wouldn't it be better, to die for a cause, than to die, for nothing? If you're going to die anyway, why not make it worthwhile? That is a privilege, to die, for Jesus Christ.

Whenever you are allowed harassment, and persecution, it means, God thinks, you can handle it. And, if there’s no harassment, in your life, maybe He, doesn't think, you can handle it. You're not, a strong enough, Christian.

**3) It is only, . . . temporary.** 2 Corinthians 4:17 – *"These troubles, won't last, very long. Yet, this short time of distress, will result in God's richest blessing, upon us, forever and ever!"*  Paul says, we don't look at the things, that are seen, . . . we look at the things, that are unseen. The things, that are seen, are temporary. They're not, . . . going to last. The things, that are unseen, . . . are permanent.

Paul had, . . . an eternal perspective, and he said, "I'm going to spend 80, 90 years at the max, . . . here on earth. But, I'm going to spend thousands, millions of years in eternity, reaping the rewards, of what I did, with my life, for 60, 70 years. What's more, important?" He says, Look at it, . . . from an eternal perspective.

When you get an eternal perspective, all of a sudden, all the houses, cars, material things, don't matter, two bits. It's all going to burn up, . . at the judgment. What is going to last, is how I used my life, now, . . . for the 70, 80 years, and, then I get to reap the rewards, for millions of years. You will spend far more time, on that side of eternity, . . . than you will, on this side of eternity. Make your life, count.

So what? So, you get persecuted. So, you get put down. Somebody laughs, behind your back, and calls you a Holy Joe, or a fanatic, or a Jesus freak? God's up there, . . checking it off, making records. It's only, temporary.

So, . . . he says, rejoice. Don't rejoice, over the hurt! The goal of the Christian life, is not persecution, . . . but, to be like Jesus. If you're like Jesus, it is inevitable, . . . that somebody, is not going to like it.

**4) Remember, . . . my reward**. V. 12 – *"Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward, . . .* [not average, great], *is your reward, in heaven."* There are special honors, reserved for those, . . . who experience persecution. Jesus says, you are in good company: *"For so persecuted they, the prophets, which were before you."* "You mean, I might be considered, in the same class, . . . as Isaiah, and Jeremiah?"

History tells us, that every one, of the 11 remaining disciples, were martyred, . . . except John, who died, on the isle of Patmos. Everyone were killed, crucified, or tortured. Peter, was crucified, . . . upside down.

There are going to be, degrees of reward, . . . in Heaven. We're not all, going to be the same. There are levels, of reward, in Heaven. The Bible says, that there will be great reward, for people, . . . who handle harassment, . . . with the right attitude.

We read the verse, that says, *"Store up treasures, . . . in Heaven."* One of the ways, you store up treasures, in Heaven, . . . is by responding, like Jesus would, . . . when people, put you down. It's your, . . . attitude. And, some of us, . . . are going to be, pretty poor, when we get up there.

Romans 8:17 – *"Since, we are God's children, if we share Christ's suffering, we will also share, in His glory."*  We're going to share, in His glory? If we share in His suffering, we will share in His glory. You have no idea, what that involves. But, it's better, . . . than, you can imagine. Is it worth the little put downs, at school, when you consider, what's going to happen, for eternity? We're going to share, . . . in His glory!

Matthew 19:29 – *"Whatever you give up, for the Lord's sake, here on earth, . . . He will restore a hundred fold, in eternity."*  That's, . . . 10,000% interest!

Why do, we rejoice? Focus, on the future rewards. Recognize, the source. Harrassment, is from the devil, not that person, who is hassling you. It's a spiritual battle. You refuse, . . . to retaliate. Respond, positively. Love them, pray for them. And, rejoice over it, because God's Spirit, can be seen, . . in your life. And, He trusts you, with persecution. It's only temporary, anyway. The reward, is going to far outweigh, the inconvenience.

**5) Remain, . . . faithful**. You persevere, . . . in doing, . . . what is right. I Peter 4:19 – *"So, those who suffer, according to God's will, should commit themselves, to their faithful Creator, and continue, to do good."*

Underline, "suffer according, to God's will". That's not, a theme, you hear, too often, on television. What you hear on television is, God wants you always, to be happy, healthy, be a millionaire, and if you're sick, or suffering, . . it's because you're sinning, or you're out of God's will. The Bible says, that sometimes, . . . suffering, . . . is God's will. That's the exact opposite, . . . of what the health and wealth gospel, teaches.

Then, it says, that those who are suffering, *". . . should commit themselves, to their faithful Creator, . . . and, continue, to do good."* Remain faithful, . . . persevere, in doing what's right. People can laugh at you, until the end of times, . . . but, it can't stop you, . . . unless you let it. A laugh, never destroyed, anybody. A put down, never destroyed, anybody. A rejection, never destroyed, anybody. Unless, . . . you, let it.

The Apostle Paul, was absolutely, unstoppable. Nothing, could stop the guy. In Acts he says, "I'm going to go back, to Jerusalem." They said, "Don't you know, there is a group, in Jerusalem, . . that have committed themselves, to killing you. They've taken a vow before God, that they're going to kill you, if you come there." He said, . . . "Big deal! A guy's got to die, . . . sometime. I'm going, . . . to Jerusalem."

What does it take, to stop you? One little word, of criticism? One little threat, of criticism? Somebody, in your office, might think you're a weirdo, . . . because, you read your Bible, . . . during the coffee break?

\*\* Three Questions:

**1. What is your faith, costing you?** In much of the world, it's costing them, their lives. We have it so easy, in America. We have, . . . air conditioned Christians. We know little, of suffering. We don't have, . . to sacrifice. We think, our problems, are big. But, most of the world, would love to have the problems, of America.

**2. At what cost, would you, . . stay faithful, to Christ?** What could cause us, to deny, our faith? Most of us, are not worried, about persecution. It's convenience. If it's not convenient, . . . we don't want to do it.

**3. How many people, . . know you're a Christian?** How many people, at work, know, you're a believer? Not that, you go to church. How many know, . . . what you believe? Big difference. There’s a lot, of church goers.

The number one reason, that people don't witness, is the fear of rejection. "What will they think, if I tell them, God loves them? What will they think, if I say, `Jesus Christ died, for me, and for you?' What will they think, . . . if I invite them, . . . to church?" Who cares, . . . what they think?

If we see somebody, in a burning house, and it's falling down, and they're inside, we lose all our fear. We just, run in there, . . . and, get them. It becomes, our business, . . . if they're dying.

And, there are people, all around us, folks, who are dying, and going to hell. 176,000 people, will die, and go to hell, in the next 24 hours, . . . and, we don't care. Every time, I could snap my fingers, . . . 3 people die. That's why, . . . we have church. People need, . . . the Lord. (Invite someone, to church, . . . this week.)

If you do all of these things, you're going to be harassed, and hassled. Never, let anybody laugh you out of, . . . living for Christ! Jesus, is very honest. He never, . . . watered down, commitment. He says "There is a price, . . to be paid, . . for following Me." Popularity, here on earth, is never guaranteed, by the gospels. But, reward in Heaven, . . . is guaranteed.

Like the story, of the old missionary, . . . who had spent his life, in Africa. He had lost his wife, and family, to malaria. He had spent 60 years slaving away, . . nobody knew about it. He was coming home, a broken man, his health was broken, . . . he was dying. He didn't have friends, in America.

He happened to come home, on the same plane that Eisenhower, came home on, from World War II. When the airplane, landed in New York, they opened the door, rolled out the red carpet, and there were bands, and confetti, and signs everywhere, that said, "Welcome home, Ike!" Everybody was thrilled, and shouting.

The missionary, came off the plane, and saw all these people, welcoming Eisenhower. He started getting a little discouraged. He said the devil, said to him, "This is what, . . you gave up. You lived for the Lord, all your life, and, this is what you get. Nobody knows, or cares. You're lonely. You're dying. You're old, and sick."

He started, feeling sorry for himself, and God just tapped him, on the shoulder, "Son, . . . you're not home, yet."

You won't be in Heaven, five minutes, . . . before you say, "Why didn't I, give more! Why didn't I, serve more! Why didn't I, love more! Why didn't I, witness more! Why didn't I, make my life count! Why did I, waste it on things, . . . that, didn't matter."

How are you, . . . using, your life? Are you using it, . . . to build, your kingdom, . . . or, God's kingdom?

“Handling Harassment for Your Faith”, Don't Worry - Be Happy! Part 8 of 8

Matthew 5:10-12 – "Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires;

the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!"

**\*\* The Reality of Harassment:** “It’s going to happen.”

 ". . . **when** men insult you . . ." (vs 11a)

**\*\* The Reason for Harassment:** “Following Jesus.”

 ". . . because you are my followers" (vs. 11b)

 John 15:20 – “No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”

 2 Timothy 3:12 – “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

**\*\* My Response to Harassment:**

1. Recognize \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 Ephesians 6:12 – “We are not fighting against human beings, but against wicked spiritual forces . . .”

 Revelation 12:10

2. Refuse \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 Rom. 12:17, 19 – “If someone does evil to you, don't pay him back with evil . . . Never take revenge . . . let God's wrath do it.”

 I Peter 2:23

3. Respond \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 Romans 12:21 – “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

 Matthew 5:44 – “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

4. Rejoice \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 "Be glad and happy . . .!" (vs 12a)

**\*\* Reasons to Rejoice:**

1. It means \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 1 Peter 4:14 – “If you are insulted because of Christ, you are blessed, . . . for God's Spirit rests on you.”

2. It means \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Acts 5:41 – “The apostles were full of joy that God considered them worthy to suffer disgrace for Jesus' name.”

3. It is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 2 Corinthians 4:17 – “These troubles . . . won't last very long. Yet this short time of distress will result in God's richest blessing upon us forever and ever!”

4. Remember \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Romans 8:17 – “Since we are God's children . . . if we share Christ's suffering, we will also share in His glory.”

5. Remain \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 1 Peter 4:19 – “So those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.”