

Matthew 5:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Analysis

Jesus commands a counterintuitive response to persecution: 'Rejoice, and be exceeding glad' (Greek: χαίρετε καὶ ἀγαλλιᾶσθε, 'rejoice and exult greatly'). Two reasons are given: 'great is your reward in heaven' and 'so persecuted they the prophets.' The future reward transcends present suffering, providing eternal perspective. Linking disciples with prophets places them in the succession of faithful witnesses who suffered for truth. This establishes persecution as the normative experience of God's messengers, not an aberration. Joy in suffering demonstrates kingdom values that invert worldly logic.

Historical Context

Jewish tradition honored prophetic martyrs - Isaiah reportedly sawn in two, Jeremiah imprisoned, many killed. Stephen's martyrdom (Acts 7) explicitly connects his persecution with prophetic tradition. The early church embraced suffering joyfully (Acts 5:41), viewing it as privilege and participation in Christ's sufferings. This verse shaped martyrological theology where suffering became a badge of authenticity and union with Christ.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How can we genuinely rejoice in suffering without denying its painfulness?
2. What does it mean to have an eternal reward perspective that transforms present hardship?
3. How does connecting our experience with the prophets encourage faithfulness under opposition?

Interlinear Text

χαίρετε καὶ ἀγαλλιᾶσθε ὅτι τοὺς μισθοὺς ὑμῶν πολὺς
Rejoice **and** **be exceeding glad** **for** **which** **reward** **is your** **great**
G5463 G2532 G21 G3754 G3588 G3408 G5216 G4183

ἐν τοὺς οὐρανοῖς· οὕτως γὰρ ἐδίωξαν τοὺς
in **which** **heaven** **so** **for** **persecuted they** **which**
G1722 G3588 G3772 G3779 G1063 G1377 G3588

προφήτας τοὺς πρὸ ὑμῶν
the prophets **which** **were before** **is your**
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Additional Cross-References

Luke 6:23 (Prophecy): Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.

James 1:2 (Parallel theme): My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

Colossians 3:24 (Parallel theme): Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.

1 Peter 4:13 (Parallel theme): But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

Colossians 1:24 (Parallel theme): Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:

Romans 5:3 (Parallel theme): And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

Ruth 2:12 (Parallel theme): The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.

Psalms 58:11 (Parallel theme): So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.

Isaiah 3:10 (Parallel theme): Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.

2 Chronicles 36:16 (Prophecy): But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy.