

*Read also Jeremiah 20:1-13. Check out the service, which is recorded on [www.fpcd.org](http://www.fpcd.org).*

What things would you do, no matter what somebody said? What do you absolutely love, take pleasure in; it makes life worthwhile?

Even if your wife or your husband makes fun of you – or your friends - you are still going to do it. I'm going to suggest that if you don't have something to feel passionate about, you need to find something.

I asked a young lady named Sandy what things she would do, no matter what somebody said. One of her answers was, "Practice my religion." I asked if she has been mocked for stating her beliefs. She said, "Yes." I asked, "Did it make you stop talking about it?" "No, she said, ten minutes of being ridiculed could not replace ten years of going to church and practicing my faith."

She talks because she feels like what she believes in is right. She adds, "Others might deny it, but I cannot. I know what's happened to me and when God spoke to me. So it makes me take a stand, even if I get criticized."

Sandy experienced a very significant event when she was put on bed rest while carrying twins. And another Christian, who had the same condition, only she lost her baby, paid Sandy's entire salary during that ten-week period. She was one of those of whom Jesus spoke when He said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." That beautiful Christian now has another child.

Both women have experienced God's presence and God's power in their lives.

You have had experience with God. Do you value it? Are others able to shut you up with their criticism, mocking, lying or gossiping about you? You have to know the power or pleasure of God in your life to stand up against persecution.

Is your experience of the faith joyful? Is it full of benefits?

Today we come to the end of the Beatitudes. In them we see lots of joy. There's:

- Happiness for being let in even when we are spiritually unsophisticated;
- Happiness knowing that when we mourn we will be comforted;
- Gladness knowing that the humble, not the proud, will inherit the earth;
- Great joy over holding firmly to righteousness as a core value, rather than sin, evil or things that displease God;
- Delight in giving mercy, knowing we will receive mercy;
- Pleasure over helping people not fight and contend but get along.

Would you agree that it's all worth standing up for? This is the pleasure you experience – and there are times you experience the power of God.

You may not think of it as worth it to stand up for, but this morning I would like for us to get a handle on the BLESSINGS we experience. So let's read Jesus' words: READ Matthew 5:11-16

Others who observe them should say, “WOW!” over your good deeds.

God can help out in the doing of good deeds. Here’s an example.

A Christian named Robert Haberman of Old Mystic, CT, posted this story as his comment on a New York Times newspaper article entitled “Why, God?,” which was published on Christmas Day, 2012:

John Thomas is a musician in NYC. On a chilly November, he was playing at the Starbucks Café on 51st & Broadway for tips when he noticed a lady in a chair swaying and singing along with the music. Afterwards, she apologized for singing and John then asked if she would like to sing the next selection. She asked if he knew any hymns.

John picked “His Eye Is on the Sparrow.” Everyone in Starbucks listened attentively as they sang: “I sing because I’m happy, sing because I’m free. For His eye is on the sparrow & I know He watches me.”

The people in Starbucks gave her thunderous applause. She turned to John and said, “It’s funny you picked that hymn. It was my daughter’s favorite. She was 16. She died last week of a brain tumor. I’m gonna be OK. I keep trusting the Lord and singing His songs.”

Robert Haberman asks, *Was all this just a coincidence of time, place, people, and a hymn? Or did God intervene at just the right moment? Was it simply a random event that had no causal link or was she touched by God? Was it coincidence or contact?*<sup>1</sup>

See, when you open your mouth to bless someone, God steps in with power. The musician could have refused to sing a hymn or said, “I’m not prepared.”

But he didn’t. He stepped up and so did God. He was salt to the woman and they were both salt to that crowd in Starbucks. Robert Haberman, the man who wrote this story, was light to his readers as he concluded his article with this:

*“Twenty-seven years ago my wife and I lost our daughter to AIDS. I was an atheist and in my grief wanted to know where the love of my daughter came from. My search brought me to God.”*

You see, God made all the difference. Sometimes we fail to be a witness to Jesus because we think tragedy is the thing that turns people away from God but not necessarily. Faith in Jesus Christ acts to bring help through tragedy.

But how will people know without you – unless you step up and tell them?

Perhaps we also fail because we fear the mocking.

---

<sup>1</sup>Robert Haberman, Old Mystic, CT, NYT Pick comment to “Why God,” *New York Times*, December 25, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/26/opinion/dowd-why-god.html? r=0>, accessed January 15, 2013.

Jeremiah the Prophet went through it. Rather than the respect he deserved, he received many abuses. You heard them. Paul, too, experienced abuse. He writes:

“Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. . . . (I was in) danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. (2 Cor 11:24-27)

Why would these two men do this?

Jeremiah acknowledged that he was mocked every day. He said:

“But if I say I'll never mention the LORD or speak in his name, his word burns in my heart like a fire. It's like a fire in my bones! I am worn out trying to hold it in! I can't do it!” (Jere 20:9) Yet he adds: But the LORD stands beside me like a great warrior. Before him my persecutors will stumble. They cannot defeat me. They will fail and be thoroughly humiliated. Their dishonor will never be forgotten. O LORD . . . I have committed my cause to you. Sing to the LORD! Praise the LORD! For though I was poor and needy, he rescued me from my oppressors. (v. 11-13)

And Paul says,

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . .” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Ro 8:35-39)

If you belong to Jesus and live in His Kingdom you are in a perfectly safe place.

Put your confidence in Jesus for everything. If it does not cost you – if no one ever objects to what you say - you are not invested. And yet this investment brings you GREAT REWARD and blessing.

Still having a problem? Remember back to the person who told you about Jesus. Nobody learns by osmosis. Look around you. We are in this together.

Listen to your Lord: (Matt 5:11-16, *The Message*)

“Count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don't like it, *I* do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble. *Let me tell you why you are here.* You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.

Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. *Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.*"

And that is the best deal on earth.

AMEN