

Devotion The Blessings of Persecution

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

As Jesus wraps up His teaching on the Beatitudes, He focuses lastly on **“Persecution.”** He knew when His followers conducted their lives in obedience to His teaching of these eight Beatitudes, they would experience persecution. As His followers model His attitudes and actions, they are modeling righteousness. Not an external righteousness based on the law, but an internal righteousness that comes from a heart that has been transformed by Christ---a transformed character that expresses itself in Christ-like conduct.

For some time we have observed racial, political and economic persecution. Now, in our nation, we are beginning to see more and more persecution for spiritual beliefs, especially Christian beliefs. The persecution of believers is becoming more pronounced as evidenced by committed Christians being disrespected, ridiculed, marginalized, despised, injured and put to death. As T.G. Horton said, *“Christ died to take the curse from us, not the cross.”* J.C. Ryle said, *“They drink the same cup as their Master.”*

When one is persecuted, suffering results. It may be mental, emotional, or physical. Peter tells us, *“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” (1 Peter 4:12-13).* The purpose of the Beatitudes is to not only bring blessing and peace to those who model them, but also to all who are the recipients of them. Yet, often just the opposite occurs because almost all the Beatitudes are contrary to the principles of the world. The world praises pride, not humility, endorses sin, not purity and pursues power, not peace. When believers model the Beatitudes, Jesus blesses them and the world often despises them. Therefore, believers should expect persecution if they are living a godly life in Christ Jesus (**2 Timothy 3:12**). A. W. Pink said, *“The world hates God’s holy image and those who bear it, His truth and those who walk in it.”* Jesus sums it up when He says, *“If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (John 15:19, 20).*

Believers are not to seek persecution, but peaceful resolutions to cultural and relational differences even in the wake of hostile responses. Moral decay invades every area of life and believers should expect persecution to intensify when they model Christ. When believers experience persecution for righteousness sake, it is Christ and His righteousness that are being persecuted.

How should committed followers of Christ react to this kind of treatment? Rejoice and be glad! Why, because their reward will be great. *If we endure, we will also reign with Him (2*

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Timothy 2:12a). Persecution though painful, is really a blessing. Let's look at some of the blessings for those who endure persecution:

1. Confirmation that you belong to Him (*John 15:19*)
2. The opportunity to glorify God by one's courage, perseverance and fidelity to Him (*Acts 5:41*).
3. Experience His comfort (*2 Corinthians 1:5*).
4. Develop perseverance (*James 1:2*).
5. The Spirit of glory and of God will rest upon you (*1 Peter 4:14*).
6. His glory will be revealed in you (*Romans 8:18*) and to you (*1 Peter 4:13*).
7. Confirmation that you bear His name (*1 Peter 4:16*).
8. Close association with His prophets (*Matthew 5:12*)
9. You will receive the crown of life (*James 1:12*).
10. You will be a worthy example for those who follow after (*Ephesians 5:1-2*).

Daniel, a Nigerian, has lost his wife, brother and father at the hands of murders because of their faith in Christ. He has been forced to flee multiple times when extremists have tried to kill him for his faith as well. If anyone might feel that God has failed him in the middle of persecution, he would be a likely candidate. Yet, he says: ***“My internal joy remains constant. I always thank the Lord for giving me the opportunity to partake in Christ's suffering; I don't even mind even the hardest.”***

Daniel looks to **2 Corinthians 5:1** for motivation:

“For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands.”

All of the Beatitudes we have explored during the past eight months are to be modeled by committed, Spirit-filled followers of Jesus Christ. They are the fruit of a life lived in holiness.

Questions to Consider:

1. ***Is Christ's character seen in me? If not, which of the Beatitudes must I concentrate on in the days ahead?***
2. ***Do my attitudes and actions reveal Christ's righteousness? If not, what adjustments must I make?***
3. ***Does my world take note because they see Jesus in me?***

The word “Christian” was coined in Antioch to describe those who so imitated Christ that the world took note.

Prayer to Offer:

Lord, will you display your grace and mercy to a watching world through me today?

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