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In our last lesson, we talked about the blessing of peace. Prior to that, it was purity of heart, and mercy. These blessings are also attributes of God. As God's children, our goal needs to be to be more like Him. As we offer God ourselves as "living sacrifices", we become "transformed by the renewing of our minds" (*Romans 12:1-2*).

The Lord Jesus Christ was and is despised and rejected. He is hated without a cause. His message to His followers was this, *"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."* (*John 15:18-20*).

But, with this persecution comes God's blessing. *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you on My account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."* (*Matt. 5:10-12*)

The world system, under the direction of Satan, the "god of this world" (*2Cor. 4:4*), is at war with God. We have a choice of sides and there is no neutrality; *"he that is not with Me is against Me"* (*Matt. 12:30*). We can stand with God and be judged by the world, or stand with the world and be judged by God. Some wrongly believe they can have both, but *"friendship with the world is enmity with God"* (*James 4:4*). If we join God's side, His enemies will become our enemies as well.

Religion that permits people to comfortably stay in their sins will be popular and acceptable to the world, but repentance, a narrow gate, and a narrow way (*Matt. 7:13-14*). But, history confirms that throughout the ages the righteous have suffered for their faith. In fact, more Christians were martyred in the 20th century than the previous 19 combined. Of course, persecution takes many forms other than death, some harsher than others. But *"all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."* (*2Timothy 3:12*)

In *Matt. 5:10-11* Christ names two causes for persecution: for righteousness and on His account (for His name's sake). We need to distinguish between persecution (for doing good) and punishment (for doing evil). *1Peter 4:4-14-16* speaks of this difference, *"If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you... If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer... however, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but glorify God in this matter."*

God's blessing comes with persecution that results from our seeking to do His will and honor His name. If selfish motivation causes us to misrepresent Christ in an arrogant or self-serving way, we may suffer consequences but this is not persecution for godliness. But if we behave as Jesus did, we will *"share in the fellowship of His sufferings"* (*Phil. 3:10*).

Behaving and living as Jesus did means living by the Beatitudes. It is the opposite of the world system. The world says "me first"; Christ says "be humble and poor in spirit". The world says "live as you want"; Christ says "mourn sin". The world sees meekness as weakness, and has little concern for biblical righteousness, mercy, and purity in heart.

Whose standards will we follow? *Psalm 1* begins, *"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,"* or stand with sinners or sit with scorners. *"But his delight is in the law of the Lord"* (righteousness). The root meaning of "righteousness" is to divide, or to be different. Sinners despise righteousness because it exposes evil. *"The light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light, because their works were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, for fear that his works will be exposed."* (*John 3:19-20*)

Christ Himself is the "Light of the world" (*John 8:12*). But just after these Beatitude "blessed" statements, He says to the citizens of His kingdom, *"You are the light of the world."* (*Matt 5:14*) Just as the moon reflects the light of the SUN, we are to reflect the light of the SON.

A proper attitude of mind is an essential weapon for spiritual warfare. We need the mind of Christ. We have three choices. We can be like Satan and return evil for good. We can be like the world and return good for good and evil for evil. Or, we can be like Christ and return good for evil.

Persecution for Christ's sake is evidence we are living for Him. It also gives us further opportunity to witness for Him. We mentioned "martyrs"; those that have died for their faith. The word "martyr" is a transliteration of the Greek word for "witness".

The rewards are great for the believer who suffers persecution in God's will. There is a present reward, *"for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* This is not about entering the kingdom (the first Beatitude covered that) but enjoying the kingdom. We enjoy God's spiritual riches as we reign in life through Christ. We live on a higher plane that the world cannot understand or appreciate. But there is great future reward: *"your reward is great in heaven", and "if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him"* (*2Timothy 2:12*).

Matthew 5

The Sermon on the Mount

5 Seeing the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him.

The Beatitudes

2 And He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

5 “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you on My account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Salt and Light

13 “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Memory Verse for the Week

*“The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked;
who can know it?”
(Jeremiah 17:9)*