

“Blessed are Those Who are Persecuted for Righteousness’ Sake”

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

A. Matt. 5:10-12

1. Persecute - “to pursue, follow after, as one does a fleeing enemy; to vex, or oppress, injure ones name, reputation, property, to endanger or take life” (Barnes Notes)
2. From the beginning, people have been persecuting others different from themselves, especially over religious, philosophical, and political differences.
 - a. “Those who think godly living makes them invulnerable to trouble are living in a fantasy world. ‘Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.’” (2Tim. 3:12) (Ray C. Stedman, Let God Be God)
3. Jesus is not speaking of persons under persecution for any other purpose than that they are Christians walking in righteousness and serving the Lord.
4. Jesus is not promising to protect anyone from persecution. God did not even spare His Own Son - Rom. 8:32
5. “I want men who will believe in Me, even when I do not protect them; I will not open the prison doors where My brethren are locked; I will not stay the murderous Red sickle or the imperial lions of Rome, I will not halt the Red hammer that batters down My tabernacle doors; I want My missionaries and martyrs to love Me in prison and death as I loved them in My own suffering. I never worked any miracles to save Myself. I will work few miracles even for My saints. Be gone, Satan! Thou shalt not tempt the Lord, thy God.” (Fulton Sheen, Life of Christ)

B. The persecution of the first century counterintuitively caused the church to grow strong, instead of destroying it

1. “It was strictly forbidden to preach to other prisoners. It was understood that whoever was caught doing this received a severe beating. A number of us decided to pay the price for the privilege of preaching, so we accepted the communists’ terms. It was a deal; we preached and they beat us. We were happy preaching. They were happy beating us, so everyone was happy. God will judge us not according to how much we endured, but how much we loved.” (Richard Wurmbrand, Tortured for Christ)

C. If persecution in the first century facilitated the growth of the church as well as that of individual Christians, what will be the effect on the church of a lack of persecution in the 21st century?

1. “If outside forces and culture were the reasons behind declining and non-influential churches, we would likely have no churches today. The greatest periods of growth, particularly the first-century growth, took place in adversarial cultures. We are not hindered by external forces; we are hindered by our own lack of commitment and selflessness. Persecution is an enemy the Church has met and mastered many times. Indifference could prove to be a far more dangerous foe.” (Thom S. Rainer, I Am a Church Member: Discovering the Attitude that Makes the Difference)

- D. Do not make the silly mistake in believing that prejudice and mockery in our time is the same as the persecution of the 1st century; it is not even close
 - 1. “No Christian has the right to go around wringing his hands, wondering what we are to do in the face of the present wicked world. The Scriptures say that in the midst of persecution, confusion, wars, and rumors of wars, we are to comfort one another with the knowledge that Jesus Christ is coming back in triumph and glory.” (W. Graham)
- E. This is the beatitude that speaks of the testing of one’s faith - 1Peter 1:6-7

I. SOME THINGS ARE NOT PERSECUTION

- A. There is a difference between being persecuted and being punished for one’s misdeeds - 1Peter 4:14-16
- B. Other forms of reproach that are not the persecution Jesus addressed
 - 1. Persecution arising because one is hard to get along with, stubborn, abrasive, unpleasant, or objectionable in conduct
 - 2. Persecution arising because one is weak in faith, immature in actions, and unwise in choices and conduct in life
 - 3. Persecution arising from zealous practice of personal religious scruples of conscience or behaviors
 - 4. Persecution stemming from a judgmental, bullying, or self-righteous manner of proselyting
 - 5. Persecution arising for being a good person, vulnerable to predators and frauds that cheat and take advantage
- C. None of the above are under discussion in Matthew 5:10

II. PERSECUTION THAT IS BLESSED

- A. Consider the entire declaration of Jesus - Matt. 5:10-12
 - 1. The Lord specifies two reasons for this persecution:
 - a. “For righteousness sake”
 - b. “For My sake”
 - 2. “The world has no problem accepting and following a religious leader who permits them to stay in their sins; but they will crucify the man who dares to point them to a narrow gate that leads to a narrow way. Jesus was different, and a world that thrives on conformity cannot tolerate differences. We are children of light, and they are children of darkness. We are alive in the Spirit, and they are dead in sins. We live by faith, and they live by sight. We understand them, but they do not understand us. Let a man announce that he belongs to a religious group – be it Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, or what have you – and few people, if anybody, will get upset. But let him announce that he is a Christian, let the name of Christ come into the conversation, and war is declared.” (Warren Weirsbe)
- B. Consider the testimony of Scripture - John 15:18-21; 2Tim. 3:10-12
 - 1. Jesus meant the persecution that comes from following Him, putting our faith in Him, and having our lives changed by Him; he will be different from the world, and the world will notice and react

III. PERSECUTION IS PROOF OF FAITH

A. Rom. 8:35-39; 2Cor. 4:8-18; Rev. 2:8-10

B. Persecution is the proof of our faith for two reasons:

1. Of the beatitudes, it is the only one that is not an internal characteristic of the disciple, but one which he or she must endure from others
2. Persecution demands that all of the other beatitudes are at work in a person's life to facilitate bearing with it

C. To withstand persecution for the sake of the Lord and righteousness is evidence of our own faith and an assurance of a home in heaven