

Blessed in Persecution

Matthew 5:11-12

INTRODUCTION

- A. Illustration about Obadiah Holmes being beaten in Massachusetts and saying to his tormentors, “Gentlemen, you have whipped me with roses!,” *Encyclopedia of 15,000 Illustrations*, #9181.
- B. Those of us who are Christians will face persecution — there is no way around that.
 - 1. “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12).
 - 2. “No one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this” (1 Thess. 3:3).
 - 3. In telling his disciples what would occur before the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus said, “You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake” (Lk. 21:16-17).
- C. In this last Beatitude, Jesus pronounces a blessing upon those who are persecuted.
 - 1. Those who are persecuted receive God’s blessing.
 - 2. The world — and even Christians — may turn their back on them, but God never will.
- D. Just before this Beatitude, Jesus had been talking about peacemaking. It seems so very odd that Jesus would go directly from peacemaking to persecution.
 - 1. But, the world often persecutes those who are striving for peace. E.g.: Israel’s Prime Minister Rabin was assassinated because he was striving for peace.
 - 2. Also, not all attempts at peacemaking succeed. E.g.: Shortly before the Gulf War, Secretary of State James Baker met with the Iraqi foreign minister, but those negotiations went nowhere.
- E. Tonight, we want to think about persecution.

THE REASON FOR THE PERSECUTION

- A. Jesus says that we are blessed when we are persecuted “for My sake.”
 - 1. This means because of our allegiance to him.
 - 2. This persecution that comes is specifically because we are trying to do what’s right, because we are trying to honor Jesus in our daily lives.
 - 3. So many considered it a compliment that they were on the Nixon enemy list during the Watergate scandal.
 - a. They considered it a mark in favor of their character because the Nixon Administration was so corrupt.
 - b. Likewise, we are persecuted because of our association with Jesus. It really should be a mark in favor of our character if we are persecuted for the sake of Jesus.
- B. Why would those who follow Jesus be persecuted?
 - 1. Those who follow Jesus will be persecuted because they are not of this world.
 - a. “Because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (Jn. 15:19).
 - b. People tend to dislike others who are not just like they are — if they are of a different skin color, they don’t like them; if they are of a different weight, they don’t like them; if they are of a different economic status, they don’t like them.
 - 1) This attitude was abundantly clear during the civil rights era when white persecuted blacks just because they were different.
 - 2) The same is true with Christianity — some will persecute Christians just because they are

different.

2. Those who follow Jesus will be persecuted because they strip away the world's cloak of sin.
 - a. "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).
 - b. The reason those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution is clear — they condemn the world's sinfulness through their righteous behavior. Whether or not a word is ever spoken Christians condemn the world by living righteously and refusing to participate in the activities of the world.
3. Those who follow Jesus will be persecuted because the world does not know God or Christ.
 - a. "These things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me" (Jn. 16:3).
 - b. The world does not understand our allegiance nor our behavior, because they do not know the Lord whom we serve.

THE TYPE OF PERSECUTION

A. Jesus here discusses three different types of persecution we might face.

B. Let's think just a bit about those types of persecution.

1. We can be reviled.
 - a. To revile means to heap insults upon.
 - 1) The chief priests mocked Jesus among themselves (Mk. 15:31-32).
 - 2) Those who were crucified with Jesus heaped insults upon him (Mk. 15:32).
 - b. We can often be mocked.
 - 1) "You in the church of Christ think you're the only one's going to heaven."
 - 2) "It's not going to hurt you to use profanity every now and then. What are you afraid of — being a man?"
 - 3) "Everyone else is doing it. Why don't you? What are you afraid of?"
2. We can be persecuted.
 - a. Christians have often been subject to physical persecution.
 - 1) In defending his apostleship, Paul wrote, "Are they ministers of Christ? — I speak as a fool — I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often" (2 Cor. 11:23).
 - 2) "To you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him but also to suffer for His sake" (Phil. 1:29).
 - b. The annals of Christian history are full of men and women who courageously suffered for their faith.
 - 1) During the Roman Empire, there were ten major government-sponsored persecutions against the church.
 - 2) Illustration about Restituta who died during the reign of Valerian, *6,600 Classic Sermon Illustrations*, #10,435, p. 560.
 - c. Although we do not suffer in this way today, our brethren in many parts of the world must still suffer such persecution.
3. We can have all manner of evil spoken against us.
 - a. Christians have often had false accusations brought against them.
 - 1) Jesus faced false accusations at his trial. Stephen faced false accusations at his trial.
 - 2) Paul often had false accusations railed against him.
 - 3) Christians in the first century were often accused of being cannibals because they took the Lord's Supper and incestuous because they called one another "brother" and "sister."
 - b. We can have false accusations leveled against us as well.
 - 1) "You speak about doctrine; you don't really believe in God's love and grace."
 - 2) "You people in the church of Christ believe in water salvation."

- C. There is no question that we will face persecution; we will. The only question is what kind of persecution we will face. It will be one of these kinds of persecution.

REACTING TO PERSECUTION

- A. Jesus said that when we are persecuted, we should rejoice and be exceedingly glad.
1. Scripture contains examples of those who rejoiced in their persecution.
 - a. The apostles “departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41).
 - b. “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ” (Col. 1:24).
 - c. The Hebrew Christians “joyfully accepted the plundering of [their] goods” (Heb. 10:34).
 2. We are to “rejoice to the extent that [we] partake of Christ’s sufferings” (1 Pet. 4:13).
- B. Just why should we rejoice in our persecution?
1. Our reward is great in heaven.
 - a. Those who sacrifice for Jesus shall be greatly rewarded by him.
 - 1) “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).
 - 2) “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17).
 - b. Illustration about a missionary coming home from 50 years of mission work in Africa on the same boat as Pres. Theodore Roosevelt, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, p. 306.
 2. The prophets before us were persecuted in the same way.
 - a. The prophets were often persecuted.
 - 1) Zechariah was stoned at the command of Joash (2 Chr. 24:21).
 - 2) The Israelites killed the prophets of God (Neh. 9:26).
 - 3) Jeremiah was thrown into prison (Jer. 20:2). According to tradition, Isaiah was sawn in half by Manasseh.
 - b. We ought to rejoice because the prophets faced the same persecution, for this places us on the same plane as they.
 - 1) The prophets were persecuted because of their righteousness, because of their steadfastness to God’s Word.
 - 2) If we suffer for our righteousness, because of our steadfastness to God’s Word, we will receive the same reward the prophets received.
- C. Are you rejoicing in your persecution?

CONCLUSION

- A. Are you suffering persecution as a Christian?
1. If you aren’t, it may very well be that you aren’t trying to live righteously.
 2. “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3: 12).
- B. Do you need to begin to live righteously tonight? Do you need to prepare yourself for suffering?